



**MARK
TIDD**
in
SICILY



**CLARENCE
BUDINGTON
KELLAND**



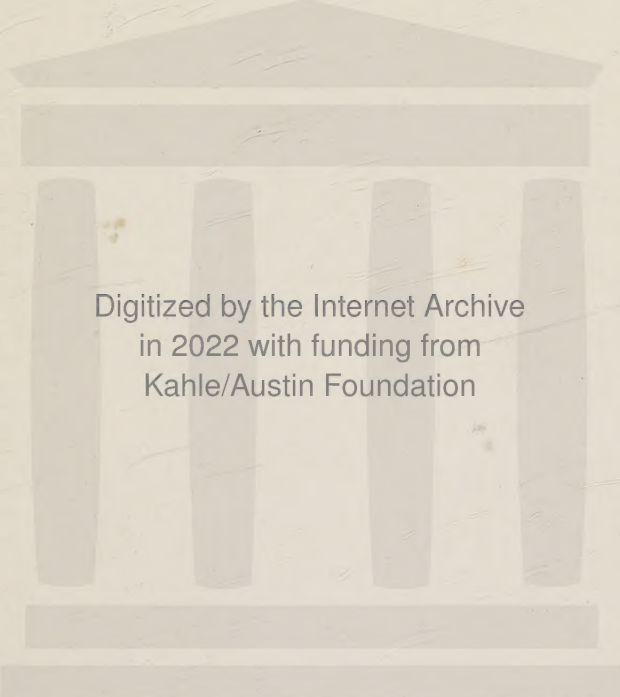


MARK TIDD
IN SICILY

BOOKS BY
CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND

MARK TIDD IN SICILY
MARK TIDD IN EGYPT
MARK TIDD IN ITALY
MARK TIDD
MARK TIDD IN THE BACKWOODS
MARK TIDD IN BUSINESS
MARK TIDD'S CITADEL
MARK TIDD, EDITOR
MARK TIDD, MANUFACTURER
CATTY ATKINS, BANDMASTER
CATTY ATKINS
CATTY ATKINS, RIVERMAN
CATTY ATKINS, SAILORMAN
CATTY ATKINS, FINANCIER

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"M-M-M-MOSQUITO BIT A HOLE IN YOUR H-HAT?"

MARK TIDD IN SICILY

BY
Clarence Budington Kelland

Illustrated



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ILLUSTRATIONS

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YOUR H-HAT?" *Frontispiece*

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BUT NOT ONE OF US LAUGHED A BIT Facing p. 50

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YELLOW, SO I KNEW IT WAS MARK'S
ORANGE " " 104

HE DROPPED IT AND GRABBED HIS HAND
AND YOWLED " " 160

MARK TIDD
IN SICILY

MARK TIDD IN SICILY

CHAPTER ONE

“**I** WANT to git,” says Mr. Tidd, “to where the’s more white folks to the acre and where the’ hain’t so many dratted camels.”

“Arabs,” says Plunk Smalley, “is white folks.”

“All but their complexions,” says Mr. Tidd, stubborn like. “To my mind a man hain’t a white man if he’s the color of coffee. And I never could endure them camels. They hain’t sensible-lookin’ beasts. Somehow they hain’t constructed right, what with humps and skinny legs and what not.”

“Where do you want to git to?” I asked him, my name being Binney Jenks, of Wicks-ville, Michigan, where Marcus Aurelius Fortunatus Tidd lives, and Plunk Smalley and Tallow Martin, too. We was sitting on the

front porch of Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo and it was pretty hot. Mr. Tidd always got kind of persnickety about things when the thermometer was high. He couldn't get any peace, he said, to sit down comfortable and read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which he would rather do than go to a circus.

"I want to start headin' for home," says he. "I hain't had a piece of apple pie fer so long I nigh forgit the taste of it."

Mark Tidd was watching a conjurer do tricks with little chickens, but he turned around to listen, and when he turned around it was some turn, I can tell you. You may have heard about fat folks, but Mark could give any of them fifty pounds and still win the championship belt. He was so fat you could hardly see his eyes, and his cheeks stuck out like he had toy balloons fastened to his face. But it was when you got below his head that you really got the best of him. I bet there was enough cloth in one of his suits to make coats and pants for Plunk and Tallow and me, and then have some left over.

And to top it off, he stutters. You never heard anybody stutter like Mark does. He'll start in on a word Monday and won't get to the

last syllable of it before Friday night. But, all the same, he manages to make himself understood pretty good. You bet he does.

Well, he looked at his pa, and the sweat was running off him in streams, and he was pretty uncomfortable.

"I d-d-don't m-mind colored f-f-f-folks and c-camels," says he, "but I do h-h-hanker for a c-cool b-breeze."

Now if that wasn't stuttering, I don't want a cent.

"Where'll you find it?" says I.

"On a s-ship crossin' the M-m-mediterranean," says he, "and the's one s-s-sailin' tomorrow from Alexandria."

"Let's go," says Plunk.

"If we kin git tickets," says Tallow.

"I got 'em," says Mark, "and if y-y-you'll p-pack, we'll take the t-train over tonight."

Now that was just like him. While everybody else sat around and fussed, he mogged off and got something done. You never found him dashing off at the last minute to see if he could get a ticket on a boat or anything. No, sir. He *had* it. He was ready. There never was the beat of him.

"But where's that there ship go to?" Mr. Tidd asked.

"Sicily's the f-f-first stop," says Mark.

"Where's Sicily?" says Mr. Tidd.

"It's where the Italians that peddle bananas comes from," says Tallow.

"It's an island," says Mark, "that's all covered with lemon trees and m-m-mountains, and ruins of Greek temples and what not, and it's got a lot of history to it."

"Roman history?" Mr. Tidd wanted to know.

"You bet," says Mark, "and Greek history and Carthaginian history, and Norman and French and Spanish, to say nothin' of Saracen and a lot of others. It's about the most cluttered up with h-h-history of any p-p-place I know."

"Seems like I heard of it," says Mr. Tidd. "A Roman feller by the name of Verres done some high-class robbin' there, and Cicero spoke a piece about him that jest blasted him off'm the map."

"That's the s-s-spot," says Mark.

"Then," says Mr. Tidd, "let's git goin'. I hain't seen no'eres near enough of them Roman senators and togas and sich like."

"I allus heard it was chock full of robbers," says Plunk.

"And Mafia," says Tallow. "What's Mafia, anyhow? Suthin like the Knights of Pythias?"

"Kind of," says I, "only different."

"Damon and Pythias lived there," says Mark. "That's where the s-s-story come from."

"How," asked Tallow, "is the Mafia different from Knights of Pythias?"

"They stick knives into folks," says I.

"Then you fellers go ahead. I'll wait for you some'eres," says Tallow. "I hain't got no room to have knives stuck in me."

"Aw, s-s-shucks," says Mark. "We hain't goin' to see no Mafia. They don't m-monkey none with tourists."

That sounded all right, but it didn't turn out to be so, not by a jugful. We saw plenty of the Mafia before we was all done with it, and, now that I look back on it, I hain't altogether sure Mark Tidd didn't go looking for them. That's the kind of a fellow he is. If there's Mafia in a place, he's jest *got* to see them go to work, and if there's lions, he's got to see lions. I hope we never head for a spot where small-pox is popular, because he wouldn't be contented till we all had it.

"Is it a big island?" I wanted to know.

"P-plenty big," says Mark, the way he

answers when he hain't sure about anything. "You won't h-h-have any complaints about the s-s-size of it. It's three-cornered."

"What of it?" says Tallow.

"Nothin' s-special," says Mark. "I jest t-thought I'd mention it. And Mount Etna's there?"

"What of *that*?" I says.

"It's a v-v-volcano," says he, "and it goes off every once in a while. It's where Pluto hid Proserpine."

"Has he got her there yit?" says Tallow.

"Why?" says Mark.

"Because I hope he hain't. We got no time to go rammin' around rescuin' girls some feller's got shut up in a volcano."

"She was a kind of a goddess," says Mark, as if that settled it.

"It wouldn't make no difference to you," says Tallow, "if she was a Queen of Sheeby."

"It's where Archimedes burnt up Roman ships with a burnin'-glass," says Mark.

"He couldn't do it," says Plunk. "You can't scarcely burn a dry leaf."

"And," says Mark, "it's 'm-m-most the fert'lest spot on earth."

"We don't cal'late to take up farmin'," says I.

"You can't tell till you g-g-git there," says Mark. "Maybe we'll all buy us a l-l-lemon grove apiece and settle d-down."

"My strong holt," says Tallow, "is raisin' Plymouth Rock chickens."

So we all knew there wasn't any use to argue about it if Mark had made up his mind we was going to Sicily, and anyhow we kind of wanted to go, because we hadn't seen it. We wanted to see as much of the world as we could before we went back to America, which would have to be pretty soon now because our folks were getting anxious to see us. We had been away quite a spell and had seen most of Italy and Egypt and Palestine and Syria, but there was heaps of places left. The world looks like it is chock full of places, and every time you finish up with one of them, there's another waiting for you to come along and visit it.

Well, we argued about it some more, just for the fun of it and because it was too hot to go any place, and then we had tea because everybody has tea out on the porch, and then we packed. Right after supper we made for the train in the bus, and it was an awful scramble at the station like it always is in Egypt, so that you wonder how anybody ever

gets aboard with his own baggage. But after a while we got into our wagon lits, which is a kind of a name for sleeping-cars, and started off for Alexandria. Mark says that's the town where Mark Antony fooled around with a queen by the name of Cleopatra until they got into some kind of trouble with a snake or something. In the morning we got there and had to hang around till almost noon, and then get examined to see if we had cholera or anything.

But at last we got on board, and the ship turned out to be one of these cruise ships that start off from America with a gang of tourists and visit every place they can think of. It was going straight to Naples from Alexandria, and we would get off there and take the train down to this Sicily place.

It was pretty rough going across the Mediterranean, and Tallow didn't get much lasting good out of his meals. Mr. Tidd he talked to a man from Iowa most of the time about this and that, and who would be the next President of the United States, and crops, and Methodists, and home cooking. We fellows, outside of Tallow, played deck games and ate and kept our eyes peeled for land.

In a day or so we sighted some, and it was Sicily. We ran along close to it and saw the

Mount Etna Mark was talking about. It was cone-shaped and covered with snow at the top, but we couldn't make out any goddesses anywhere on it. But Sicily looked terrible lumpy and hard to climb. Just before dark we went through a narrow place that Mark said was between Scylla and Charybdis, whatever that was. It was some place around here that the sirens sat on a rock and sang to Ulysses, but he had wax in his ears, so it didn't do them any good. We didn't see any sirens. It must have been their day off.

But that night we saw Stromboli erupting, and it was quite a sight and kind of scary. What with fire popping out of the top of a mountain and molten lava rolling down the sides you was glad you was off on a ship and not standing around in your back yard in the middle of it.

When we got to Naples we got off, but we'd seen Naples and Vesuvius and Pompeii, so we just fussed around and bought our mothers some coral, which looks like it is the principal product around there, and that night we took a train south.

In the morning when we woke up we were nearly to the Straits of Messina, and after a while they ran the train onto a car ferry to

carry us across. There was quite a sea running, and we rolled something terrible, but none of the train fell off into the water and we got across all right to Messina where the earthquake was that killed so many thousands of people.

We didn't stop there on account of there not being much to see, but kept right aboard the train to go to a town by the name of Taormina, which is a little ways south. And we got there in good shape and piled out at a little station down on the shore.

A fat man with a grin asked us if we were going to the Hotel Timeo, and we were, and he turned out to be the concierge by the name of Andrea Zambo. So he put us in a bus and we drove up and up and up and up till I thought we would bust right through into heaven or some place. You never saw such a climbing road nor one that had so many turns and twists in it. And all the time the sea kept dropping down and down and down. I was most dizzy with it.

Pretty quick we got to the hotel and were shown to our rooms, which overlooked the gardens and opened toward Mount Etna and a lot of olive-oil jars standing along a wall. The garden and Etna were awful pretty, but it

seemed to me there was too many olive-oil jars to make it interesting. Mark told us they were the same kind of oil jars that Ali Baba's lady friend Morgiana cooked the Forty Thieves in. Only not in Sicily.

And so there we were in a new land and pretty anxious to get out and see what it was like. So we locked our doors and started to see what we could see.

CHAPTER TWO

TAORMINA is an awful old town, and it looks it in spots. Why, there's a place where a lot of Saracen graves show, but that is comparatively recent. Folks say the first Greeks that ever landed on Sicily way back about a million years ago came ashore down in the bay below, but I don't know about that. There's an old theater like the Greeks and Romans used to have just back of the hotel, and in places you can see ruins of walls and things with swallow-tailed battlements, which meant the folks that lived there were either on the side of the Pope or the Emperor, I forget which, and anyhow it don't matter.

Well, we went out through the office and past Andrea Zambo, the concierge, and then through a garden and out on a street that runs downhill and is paved with stones. All along this are shops where they sell antiques, and shoe shops and what not, and the cobbler's place was full of hens. Almost every place in Sicily is full of hens. If you go into a parlor, why, a rooster is apt to be sitting in the best

chair, and he stays there. Honest, if you get in and sit in the chair first and the rooster comes in after, he will look at you so mean that you get up and give him the seat.

The street we were on ran into another street called the Corso, and that was all cluttered up with antique shops. It looked like the principal products of Taormina was antiques—and donkeys. Donkeys was thicker than flies around a syrup keg. Pretty soon we came to a sign that said crumpets, and none of us knew what a crumpet was. I claimed it was a musical instrument like a bagpipe, and Tallow said it was a little image made out of clay, and Plunk thought it was a kind of fruit like a banana. Mark he didn't think anything. He isn't the kind to go hazarding. No, sir, when he don't know, why, he keeps his mouth shut. If he wants to know, he goes and finds out. This time he wanted to know, so he started up some stairs and we came to a room filled with tables like in a restaurant, and we sat down.

A lady came along and looked at us, and Mark says, "C-c-c-crumpets."

"Tea?" says the lady.

"And t-t-tea," says Mark.

"Jam?" says the lady.

"G-give us," says Mark, "the whole t-three

degrees." Then he stopped and looked and says, "Ma'am, is c-c-crumpets big or little?"

"They are the proper size," says the lady.

"In that c-case," says Mark, "f-f-fetch us two orders apiece."

"Well, we was pretty curious about those crumpets and about the Englishwoman that run the place where they sold them. We didn't see why an Englishwoman should be selling crumpets in Sicily, nor why crumpets needed an Englishwoman to sell them. But we found out. Crumpets are English, and it would be against the law or something if they were sold by anybody who wasn't English.

Pretty soon they came, and what they turned out to be was a kind of a baking-powder biscuit, only with more shortening in them, and there wasn't a good bite to half a dozen. Mark didn't exaggerate a bit when he ordered two orders apiece. I wouldn't of called him exactly a hog if he'd ordered four orders.

So we ate them and licked our jam dishes and went out to see what else we could see besides donkeys and antiques. But we was in the wrong town. You could buy anything that was made a thousand years ago, but you couldn't buy a thing that was made last week. Mark says this was on account of the tourists, who go crazy

when they see an antique and have to buy it and take it home to prove to the neighbors they got superior taste. Antiques is art, and art is a very cultivated thing to have. My ma has art, but hern takes the form of gilding clothes-pins and rolling-pins and putting hooks on them to hang things on. It seems like there is a great many kinds of art, and most of it was dug up or needs to be washed or has got a crack in it.

Tallow saw all the art he wanted to pretty quick and wanted to know where a Mafia was. Mark said they didn't have any Mafias in the shop windows, on account of its being a secret society with passwords and finger-wiggings and all that. He said you might see a dozen Mafias in ten minutes and never know it. They don't wear elks' teeth or squares and compasses or even three links of a chain.

Once I looked up in the air, and there, about a billion feet higher than we were, was a town. It stuck way up in the sky on the peak of a mountain, and there was walls around it and everything.

"That," says Mark, "is Castle Mola."

"Are you allowed to go up there?" says Tallow.

"Sure," says Mark.

"Then let's," says I.

So we all started out, including Mr. Tidd, and we commenced to climb, and we kept on climbing and climbing, and the sea dropped away and the country dropped away, and we got right up above the clouds, so you couldn't always see down to the ground. It was terrible beautiful country, all valleys and mountains, and the air was chuck full of the smell of lemons. It kind of got you. I tell you what, I wouldn't of missed that feeling for a lot.

Well, about halfway up we stopped where there was a wall to lean on and looked over, and way down below you could see a road, and halfway down a kind of a pool where about forty women was doing their washing. We stood looking until, all of a sudden, Mark pointed.

"F-feller huntin'," says he.

We could see a man down there, and he looked about two inches high, and he had a gun. He wasn't far from the road where there were some bushes and rocks, and he was kind of sneaking up.

"Wonder what kind of game he's after?" says Tallow.

"Dunno," says Mark. "And he hunts funny, too. Acts to m-m-me like he was expectin' his g-g-game to come down the road."

It did look that way, for the man was working nearer to the road, and pretty soon he hunched down behind a bowlder and kind of got his gun ready. For quite a spell he didn't move a bit that we could see. Then Mark pointed again. "L-l-look!" says he.

We looked, and off a ways down the road came a donkey cart with two folks in it, just ambling along. Mark stood up and waved and hollered, but the distance was farther than he could yell and nobody paid any attention to him. The donkey cart kept coming along till it got pretty close to the rock. Then we saw a little squirt of smoke, and we saw the hat of one of the folks in the cart fly off, and then, some later, we heard the *pop* of the gun.

"He tried to shoot that feller," says Plunk.

"Knocked off his hat," says Tallow.

"But," says I, "it looks like he missed him."

"The f-f-feller's run," says Mark, and that was so, for the one we thought was a hunter had turned tail and was skedaddling down a gully like all-git-out. The man that was driving the donkey commenced to lash the critter to make him go, and didn't seem to have any curiosity at all about who had been shooting. Anyhow, he wasn't the fellow whose hat was shot off, and maybe that made a difference.

It didn't seem to be the donkey's day for hurrying. The more the man gave him the gad the slower he went, till he come to a stop and lifted up his nose and says, "EEEEEE—haw!" so loud we could hear it plain way up where we were.

"Well," says I, "that was a mean trick."

"'Twa'n't intended to be f-f-friendly," says Mark.

"Oh, wasn't it?" says I. "I thought mebbby it was the Sicilian way of sayin' good mornin'."

"What d'ye s'pose it was *fur*?" says Tallow.

"Cat's fur to make kittens' britches," says Plunk, and I hadn't heard anybody say that since I left Wicksville. It come nigh to making me homesick, it sounded so natural and all.

"Think you're funny, don't ye?" says Tallow, kind of mad because Plunk had come it over him like that. "If I was you I'd think up suthin' original, or else I'd say nothin' a-tall."

"M-mebby," says Mark, "that's why the f-f-feller was shootin' at the other—because he say cat's fur to make kittens' britches to him. I dunno but what I'd do it m-myself."

"Was somebody shootin', did ye say?" Mr. Tidd says, waking up all of a sudden to the fact that something was going on. He had been thinking all the while. You never see such an

absent-minded man as he is. Why, he's so absent-minded that he's apt to get up in the morning and try to pull on his pants over his head. "What was the shootin' fur?" he asked.

Nobody said a word about cat's fur to him, because it wouldn't of been respectable to give a come-back like that to an older person that was one of our fathers, but it *could* have been said. It was a chance, all right, but on account of good manners we had to miss it. And a fellow doesn't get a chance to holler cat's fur to make kittens' britches every day, not by a long shot. Those chances don't come so easy. Why, I've known times I've waited two weeks before I got a chance to say it.

"Mebby," says Plunk, "thet gun went off accidental."

"M-m-mebby," says Mark, "he's s-sneaked upon that road accidental. L-likely he was walkin' in his s-sleep. It had an awful a-accidental look to me."

"Then," says I, "it was bushwhackin'."

"If 'twa'n't," says Mark, "then canary b-birds is camels."

"Gosh!" says I.

"Mebby," says Tallow, "we better run and tell the police."

"Mebby," says Mark, "we b-better keep our

mouths shut. We hain't in Wicksville and we don't know about the customs and all. M-mebby it's all right here for a m-man to ambush another."

"If it is," says Plunk, "it hain't a nice custom."

"I feel kind of lonesome," says I.

"Me, too," says Tallow. "I feel like the' was mebbly more men with guns sneakin' up on me."

"What for?" says Mark.

"Jest to git in practice," says Tallow. "It stands to reason if it's the custom of this place to go out whangin' away at folks, you got to learn how. And they'd be more apt to use a tourist for a practice target than a citizen."

"From what I've seen of t-t-tourists," says Mark, "I dunno's I'd blame 'em m-much."

"Be you boys insinuat-in'," says Mr. Tidd, "that a man shot at another man?"

"We be," says Mark.

"It hadn't ought to be tolerated," says Mr. Tidd as if that settled the matter for good and all. "I'm dead set ag'in' it."

"Let's go back to town," says I. "I dunno's I got any need to see Castle Mola today. I got along without it for quite a spell, and I kin wait."

"Anyhow," says Mark, "it's g-g-gittin' too

late in the day. It 'u'd be dark before we got b-back."

"And I hain't goin' to do no mousin' around in the dark," says Plunk.

"I bet it was a Mafia," says I.

"Which one?" says Plunk.

"The man with the gun."

"Mebby," says Mark, "but it hain't that way in the b-books. Mafias is supposed to use k-knives. I dunno's they'd be allowed to shoot. It might be ag'in' the r-r-rules."

"It's ag'in' the rules for me to hang around here any longer," says I, and so we all started down the hill, and we went down faster than we came up, a heap sight. Not that we was scared. I know I wasn't—not what you'd call scared. But I had a kind of a cautious feeling come over me—like I would be jest as well satisfied if I was where there wasn't any rocks for somebody to hide behind with a gun.

We got down all right, and nobody shot at us even once. Mebby there was some of us missed it and felt like we was being slighted, but not me. I was satisfied. Even if I was a visitor there I didn't feel the need of any inhabitant givin' me such a treat. Not even if he was the best marksman in the place. I didn't covet to see any marksmanship that day.

Well, we got down at last to the Corso and started up to our hotel. There is a kind of a little square there with a wall along one side of it that is just high enough to sit on. And sitting on it was a fellow about our age. Mark nudged me.

"L-look," says he.

I looked and seen what he meant. The young fellow was looking with a kind of funny expression at his hat, and there was two holes in it, like where a bullet would go in and where it would come out again.

CHAPTER THREE

IT WAS none of our business, probably, if that fellow had his hat as full of holes as a colander, but after what we had just seen it made us kind of curious. When Mark Tidd gets curious he most generally does something about it, and this time he walked straight over and stopped and says,

“M-m-m-mosquito bit a hole in your h-hat?”

“No,” says the boy, “it was a skylark.”

“I didn’t know s-s-skylarks was man-eaters,” says Mark. “I l-learned in school they was v-v-v-vegetarians.”

“Not Sicilian skylarks,” says the boy. “They’re brought up on beefsteak till they can forage for themselves.”

“I’d s-say offhand,” says Mark, “you was an American.”

“I’m a good imitation,” says the boy, “but I’m not giving any guarantees.”

“The’s t-two holes,” says Mark, “was it t-two skylarks bit ye, or jest one with a long b-beak?”

“I couldn’t count him,” says the boy. “He was flying too fast.”

"I counted him," says Mark. "The' was j-j-just one."

At that the boy looked up pretty interested. "Did he have red feathers?" he asked.

"He l-looked to me," says Mark, "like one of them featherless Sicilian kind."

"Not even on his tail?" asked the boy.

"Mebby a few bristles," says Mark, "but n-nary a p-plume."

"Have you," asked the boy, "studied zoölogy?"

"Off and on," said Mark. "Jest as a pas-time."

"Do you know enough about it," asked the boy, "to be able to say why this skylark picked out my hat to peck holes through—instead of, say, your hat, or the king's hat, or maybe a cardinal's hat?"

"No," says Mark. "I jest s-s-s-stopped with the idee mebbby you could t-tell me."

"I can't," says the boy. "It was a complete surprise to me. I don't know as I've ever been more surprised—or pained. It wasn't polite."

"No," says Mark, "it was as r-rude a thing as I ever seen."

"Do you live here?" I asked him.

"No," says he, "I got here last night."

"And right away the b-birds start a-peckin' at ye," says Mark.

"Let's get down to business," says the boy. "What did you see?"

"We all s-s-saw a man sneak along and shoot a hole in your hat and then s-s-skedaddle like the mischief," says Mark.

"Would you know him again if you saw him?"

"He was too fur off," says Mark. "We was h-halfway up the m-mountain."

"Been here long?" asked the boy.

"Got here m-m-mebby four hours ago."

"Then you're not acquainted with the customs of the country?"

"Not to speak of."

"It wasn't an accident?"

"Didn't even r-resemble one," says Mark.

"If you didn't stop to think," says the boy, "you might think I wasn't welcome here."

"Know anybody in Sicily?"

"Not a soul."

"Um. . . ." Mark kind of grunted. "Mebby it was a b-bandit. I hear the's bandits in the m-m-mountains."

"A sensible bandit," says the boy, "don't shoot first. He points his gun at your nose and tells you to hand over."

"It l-l-looked to me," says Mark, "like a genuine example of a b-bushwhackin'."

"But why," asked the boy, "should anybody bushwhack me?"

"That," says Mark, "is what I s-s-s-stopped to find out."

"Then," says the boy, "let's argue about it. We may get an idea."

"My name," says Mark, "is Marcus Aurelius Fortunatus Tidd."

"It's a grand name," says the boy, and Mark looked at him kind of suspicious to see if he was making fun; but there wasn't any sign of it, so Mark went on and said over the rest of our names, and then the boy mentioned his, which was John Peter Sense, and that sounded like a funny name to me.

"Sense?" says Mark.

"Yes, just that. The fellows at school call me Common Sense because I've got so much of it."

"Maybe that," says Mark, "is why the f-f-feller tried to shoot ye."

"Who knows?" says John Peter. "Where are you staying?"

"At the Timeo."

"Me, too," says he.

"I hope," says I, "they don't start trying

to shoot you in the dining room. They might miss and hit me."

"I'd prefer that," says John Peter, "if I got a chance to choose."

"That," says I, "is what I call being selfish."

"No," says he; "it's just Common Sense."

Mr. Tidd began to catch up with the conversation about this time. "Be I to understand," says he, "that you're the one that was shot at?"

"Yes," says John Peter.

"They hadn't ought to have done it," says Mr. Tidd.

"Thank you, sir," says John Peter, "I'm awfully glad you think so."

"It was uncalled for," says Mr. Tidd. "If I was you I'd do suthin' about it. I dunno but what I'd go to the authorities."

"It's puzzling," says John Peter.

"Did ye ever read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*?" says Mr. Tidd.

"No," says the boy.

Mr. Tidd looked at him kind of severe, as much as to say it served him right if he did get shot at, and then he says: "The's a lot of puzzlin' things in that book—terrible puzzlin'. I've been readin' it stiddy for thutty year, and

some of 'em I hain't got solved yet—not satisfactory."

"I hope," says John Peter, "it doesn't take that long to solve this. The man might get enough practice shooting at a mark in thirty years to get so he could hit me."

"I never thought of that," says Mr. Tidd. "All the same, you ought to read that book. It's about senators and togas and dictators and emperors and all."

"I'm sure," says John Peter, "it must be very interesting."

"It's more'n that," says Mr. Tidd; "it's instructive."

"Is your f-f-folks with you?" Mark asked.

"Just a kind of a guardian," says John Peter.

"I haven't any parents."

"Oh," says Mark.

"His name," says John Peter, "is Grecco."

"It's a funny name," says I.

"He's a funny man," says John Peter.

"Don't you like him?" asked Tallow. "I know fellows who hate their guardians."

"I don't hate mine," says John Peter. "Not by a long shot."

"I've read about boys havin' wicked guardians," says Plunk, "that plotted to git holt of

their wards' fortunes. Mebby it was your'n that shot you."

John Peter laughed. "I'm quite sure," he said, "that my guardian would let himself be boiled in oil to save me from any harm."

"What m-m-makes you think so?" says Mark.

"I don't know," says John Peter, and he kind of waggled his head. "He never said so, and he's never even gotten scalded with oil yet, but I know he would. It's one of those things you are sure of without knowing why you are sure."

"A f-f-friend of your pa's?" says Mark.

"Why," says John Peter, "if you come to that, I suppose he was. He never said so."

"How did he get to be your g-g-guardeen?" Mark asked.

"He always was it."

"D'ye mean," says Mark, "you allus been an o-o-o-orphan?"

"Always," says John Peter.

"That's odd," says Mr. Tidd.

"It's time for tea," says John Peter. "Let's have it together on the terrace of the hotel."

"Fine," says I.

"And possibly," says John Peter, "you will meet my guardian then. But," he says with a kind of a puzzled frown, "don't say anything

to him about what happened this afternoon. I don't want him to worry."

"Jest as you say," says Mark. "We allus cal'late to keep our m-m-m-mouths shet about other f-folks' business."

"Much obliged," says John Peter.

And so we started up the incline toward the hotel and walked through to the terrace with vines growing on arbors to give a little shade. A waiter came along and we ordered cake and tea, and then, just as we were hoping the food would hurry and come, we saw John Peter grin and wave his hand. When we looked around a man was coming out of the hotel door. He was about fifty years old, and his hair was grizzled, but he looked strong. You know how some folks have that look—as if they could lift an elephant. He was that broad across the shoulders you wouldn't believe me if I told you the truth about it, but he wasn't more than ordinary tall. There was something about his broad face that you liked. It made you feel like you could trust him. It seemed to me like he was the kind of a man who could be depended on no matter what happened. Mark said that night that he should have been the captain of the king of Italy's bodyguard, or in

some position like that where he was responsible for somebody's safety. And that was how he did look when you came to think of it. He came over to our table and looked at us kind of grave and severe, and then John Peter introduced us, and he shook hands, but kept on being grave, though he was as polite as could be, and he talked with us and had tea with us and all. But every minute he was there his eyes kept traveling to John Peter with a look just a mite graver than he wore at other times. Finally he says:

"You were away a long time today, John. What amused you?"

"I went for a drive in a donkey cart," says John Peter.

"Outside of town?" asked Mr. Grecco.

"Back up a valley to a lemon grove," says John Peter.

"A lemon grove," says Mr. Grecco, very grave and serious.

"Yes," says John Peter.

"And did you enjoy this lemon grove?"

"Very much."

"Were there," asked Mr. Grecco, "many people on the road?"

"Only a few."

Mr. Grecco sighed kind of like he was relieved. "You are back safely," he said, and it seemed like it was more to himself than to his ward.

"Yes," said John Peter, "safe and sound."

"It is a strange country," said Mr. Grecco; "and though you speak the language, it might be well if you kept to the town—unless going with friends or with me. Sometimes things happen on lonely roads in Sicily."

"Do you mean," said John Peter, "you would rather I didn't wander about alone?"

"Yes," said Mr. Grecco, "if you don't mind."

"But why? This is a civilized country. Tourists go everywhere."

"You are not a tourist," said Mr. Grecco.

"I'm not? Then what am I?"

Mr. Grecco didn't answer that, but he says, "I am asking it as a favor, John."

"Why, certainly," said John Peter, "if you put it that way."

Suddenly Mr. Grecco's eyes fell upon John Peter's hat and stayed there, sort of staring.

"How," he asked, "came those holes in your hat?" Then he compressed his lips and shook his head. "You need not tell me, John," he said. "I have seen holes such as that in hats

before." He seemed to forget we were there and just went off into deep thought for a couple of minutes. Then he shook his head again. "It's not possible," he said. "It can't be possible . . . not within twenty-four hours."

CHAPTER FOUR

“THAT house down there,” says I, “belongs to the Duca di Rendazza.”

“G’wan,” says Tallow. “Who told you?”

“Andrea Zambo told me,” says I, “and it’s so. And the duke’s an Englishman, too. Anyhow, he was.”

“What d’ye mean was?” says Tallow.

“He’s dead,” says I. “He died a couple months ago.”

“Oh!” says he.

“Andrea says he was an old man, close to eighty,” I says.

“You b-b-been studyin’ up on dukes?” says Mark.

“No,” says I, “I was just listenin’ to Andrea while I waited for you to git up. I had to do suthin’.”

“Well,” says Plunk, “who lives there now? Some of his relatives?”

“Nobuddy,” says I, “but servants.”

“Ain’t there no duke?”

"No," says I, "they're fresh out of dukes, seems as though."

"Why?" says Mark.

"I dunno exactly," says I. "Maybe they hain't elected a new one."

"The' d-d-don't elect dukes," says Mark.

"How *do* they git them?" says I.

"They're born," says Mark. "Either you're a d-d-duke or you hain't."

"I hain't," says I.

"No question about that," says he.

"I bet," I says, "I could be as good a duke as any of 'em."

"You wouldn't like it," says Mark.

"Why not?" says I.

"Dukes," says Mark, "have to t-t-take too many b-baths. They b-belong to a lodge they call the Order of the Bath."

"Hain't the' no dirty dukes?" I says. "Or jest ordinary dukes that bathes Satiddy nights like reg'lar folks?"

"No," says he; "they have to bathe twice a d-day."

"Gosh!" says I.

"Well," says Tallow, "I've heard enough about dukes. They don't interest me."

"What does?" says I, kind of sore on account of dukes being the subject I'd picked out to talk

about. I bet Tallow would have been dead set on talking about them if he'd brought it up. But no. Just because he hadn't thought up dukes he wouldn't talk about 'em.

"Let's talk about Mafias," says he.

"I don't know nothin' about Mafias," says I.

"I do," says he.

"Where'd you f-f-find it out?" says Mark.

"And is what you know so?"

"It was in a book I found in the parlor. Somebody left it layin' and I read it some."

"He *kin* read," says I.

"Well," says Mark, "what about M-m-m-mafias?"

"It hain't a lodge," says Tallow. "It's kind of political like, and kind of patriotic. The's high-up folks b'longs to it, and riffraff, and it come into bein' back a long time when the Sicilian folks was bein' bossed by furrin kings and couldn't git no justice in the courts."

"Don't sound sensible to me," says I.

"Nothin' would," says he, "but dukes."

"Go ahead," says Mark. "What else you f-f-find out?"

"Well, the folks sort of took to settlin' their squabbles amongst themselves, and if one feller done something and another feller accused him of it, why a kind of a committee would try

the case, and then tell the feller that was damaged to go out and take it out of the other man's skin."

"Yeah?" says Mark.

"And then the first feller would go and stick a knife into the other one. And then there's Capo Mafias."

"What's them?"

"Kind of boss ones," says Tallow. "There's one in every county like. And then all the fellers that watch the lemon groves belongs, and if anybody hires a watchman that don't belong, they turn to and make it kind of tough for him. Mebby they bust down his grove and mebby they hide some'eres and shoot him full of holes."

"If it was me," says Plunk, "I'd hire one b'longin' to the union."

"Me, too," says I.

"And if you betray another one or let out any secrets, they'll foller you all over the world till they ketch you, and then they'll stick you so full of knives you look like one of them cork balls in a hardware store."

"Doggone!" says Plunk.

"Mostly," says Tallow, "they're high-minded. The book says so."

"The f-f-feller that wrote the book," says Mark, "hadn't ever been s-s-s-stabbed."

"Don't seem as though," says Tallow. "It says that, though some crim'nals have sneaked in, and bandits and sich, that it hain't no crim'nal organization like the Camorra of Naples. And they help and shelter one another. But it seems like they got a high prejudice ag'in' bein' betrayed, and it gits 'em all het up if anybody does it."

"Dunno's I b-blame 'em," says Mark.

Then I got in my oar. "This here Duke of Rendazza I was talkin' about was afraid of the Mafia," says I.

"How'd ye know?" says Mark.

"I put two and two together," says I.

"And made f-f-five," says Mark.

"All right," says I, "you put 'em together and see what you git."

"Where's your t-two and t-two?" says he.

"Well," says I, "this duke, or duca, as they call him, didn't live here much, on account of him bein' English."

"How could a Eye-talian duke be English?" says Tallow.

"He was," says I, "but whenever he come here to stay, he allus had a whoopin' bodyguard around him. And the' was a high wall around

his house here, with watchmen watchin' it all night."

"Andrea Zambo tell ye that?" says Mark.

"Yes," says I, "and he says the last fifteen year of the duke's life was all filled up with terror. And he says the duke didn't dast to move for fear of gittin' assassinated."

"No!" says Plunk.

"Yes," says I. "And when he went over to his estates near Rendezza, that he's the duke of, he rode in a closed car full of men with guns.

"M-must 'a' been pleasant," says Mark.

"So," says I, "it must 'a' been the Mafia was after him."

"It don't f-f-foller," says Mark.

"I bet it does," says I. "If it wan't the Mafia, then who was it?"

Well, he couldn't answer that, nor nobody else. It was a clincher. If they couldn't up and say right out who the duke was afraid of, and I could say it was the Mafia, then I had the best of it, didn't I? So that ended the argument and they had to admit I was right.

"But why," says Mark, "was the M-m-m-ma-fia after him?"

"That," says I, "was a secret."

"Who says so?"

"Nobuddy," says I. "Nobuddy has to say. I know."

"How d'ye know?" says Tallow.

"If 'twan't a secret," says I, "folks would know it, and nobody knows it, so it's got to be a secret."

Well, I had them again. There wasn't any way to get around that. If you know a thing and don't tell anybody, why, it's got to be a secret. And I never heard of anybody the duke told. He didn't tell Andrea, because if he had Andrea would have told me. He was that kind and just had to tell all he knew to the first person that come along.

"Anyhow," says Plunk, "it hain't none of our business."

"Thank goodness," says Tallow.

"All the s-s-same," says Mark, "it's kind of interestin'."

"Now you jest leave it alone," says I. "The duke's dead and all, and what good can come of nosin' into it?"

"I don't cal'late to," says he, bbut you could tell by the way his eyes got to shining that he was all het up over it, and if there was any way of mixing in he was going to do it. But there wasn't any way and I was glad of it, you can bet.

"Where's John Peter?" says Plunk.

"Hain't seen him this mornin'," says I.

"Wonder how old he is?" says Plunk.

"Jest about our a-a-age," says Mark, "and that's p-plenty young to be s-s-shot at."

"I liked the looks of Mr. Grecco," says I.

"I bet he's noble," says Tallow.

"He looks like he wasn't never afraid of nothin'," says Plunk.

"He's Sicilian, I bet you," says Mark.

"Why?" says Tallow. He was the doggondest feller for that—always wanting to know how you knew a thing or who told you. It seemed like he jest couldn't admit you had any sense of your own, but had to find out everything from somebody else.

"He hain't American," says Mark.

"No," says Tallow.

"He hain't F-french."

"No."

"He hain't E-e-english."

"No."

"How d'ye k-k-know?" says Mark.

"Why," says Tallow, "I dunno how I know, but he hain't."

"Well," says Mark, "that's j-j-jest how I know he's Sicilian."

"Aw, go chase yourself," says Tallow.

"Did you hear one t-t-thing he said when he heard about John Peter b-bein' s-s-shot at?"

"What one thing?"

"About its b-bein' less'n t-twenty-four hours."

"Yes," says I, "I heard that."

"He acted kind of s-s-surprised."

"Anybody'd be surprised to have his kid shot at," says I.

"He wasn't s-s-surprised at that," says Mark, "but at its comin' so s-s-soon."

"Rats!" says I.

"He was," says Mark.

"Why was it any more surprisin' to have John Peter shot at in twenty-four hours than in two weeks?" says I.

"I'm p-p-puzzlin' over that," says he. "It could be because he didn't t-t-think certain folks would know so s-s-soon John Peter was in Taormina."

"What people?" says I.

"How should I know?" says he.

"What's the difference?" says Tallow.

"Heaps," says Mark. "But I bet you Mr. Grecco knows why John Peter was shot at, and mebbey who done it."

"Fiddlesticks!" says Plunk.

"All r-r-right," says Mark; "you wait and s-s-see."

"I bet it's that Mafia," says Plunk.

"Mafias don't monkey with Americans or anybody but Sicilians," says Tallow. "The book says so."

"Then it couldn't of been them," says I. "John Peter's an American."

"I hear his voice," says Plunk. "He's in the office."

"The's a m-m-mystery about him," says Mark. "Let's kind of hang around where he is. Mebby suthin' interestin'll h-happen."

So we waited for John Peter to come out. I wasn't sure about any mystery, because Mark Tidd always is imagining something, and half the time you can't tell if what he is up to is real or make-believe. But either way you generally have some fun. And this time we had something—and it wasn't such fun, neither, when all was said and done.

CHAPTER FIVE

JOHN PETER came out of the hotel and waved his hand when he saw us. He acted like he was pleased we were around, and I guess we were pleased, too, because we had taken a kind of a liking to him.

"What's doing?" he says.

"We're j-jest waitin' to f-f-find out," says Mark. "Got any idees?"

"Let's prow'l," says John Peter; "that is, if I'm invited to tag along."

"The vote's unanimous," says Mark. "We're all here but pa, and he hain't c-c-comin' out this m-mornin'. He's been neglectin' Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and he's got to ketch up on his readin'. Besides," he says, "pa's kind of upset. He got up and tried to clean his teeth with his shavin' cream, and it didn't taste very good."

"Have you been up to the theater?" says John Peter.

"No," says Mark. "And that's a good way to p-p-pass away the time till we kin t-t-think up suthin' m-more excitin'."

"There's a path through the garden and

around the shoulder of the cliff," says John Peter. "Andrea Zambo told me so."

"Let's go that way, then," says Mark.

So we went down some steps and into the gardens, and then we turned off to the left amongst all the flowers and things, and began to climb. It was a pretty rocky place we got to, all grown up with a million cactuses, and you had to look pretty sharp or one of them leaves all covered with spines would slap you in the pants as you went by, and that wasn't any fun. Picking cactus spines out of your hide ain't the kind of amusement I hanker for.

We came out right on the face of the cliff that dropped way down to the sea. It was awful beautiful. Mark says there is folks that claim it is the most beautiful place on earth, and mebbey they're right. I don't know personal because I hain't seen them all. But it was pretty enough. You could see the coast stretching way off to the south, and there was Mount Etna sticking up with snow at the top. There weren't any clouds and the sky was as blue as a new gingham dress, so you could see the whole mountain. It kind of made you feel funny inside.

And then, the other way, you could see up towards the Straits of Messina, and down

below was the Isola Bella, which is an awful pretty little island that there is lots of stories about. Generally I would rather see something else than just scenery—mebby a circus parade or a ball game—but this morning I was kind of satisfied to look at this. We walked clean around to the other side where the cliff drops down straight for a long ways, and Mark says this would be a fine place to get pushed off of, because you'd get such a fine view while you was falling down.

Then we climbed a little more and got to the top, and below us was the old theater that we got into by going through a kind of brick tunnel. It was all ruined up, but you could sort of get an idee what it used to look like. Mark he got to making believe right off that we was Greeks way back in the days of Timoleon, who used to be a king or something like it in Syracuse and bossed this whole neck of the woods. Mark said he was a grand man and done a lot of fine things and everybody came out and voted for him at elections so that he was elected unanimous.

We pretended we was the audience and that there was thousands of us and that a Greek play was being acted down on the stage. It wasn't much fun on account of me not being

able to see the play go on, but Mark could. Anyhow, he let on he could, and kept telling what the actors was doing and how good they was in their parts. I never see the beat of him.

But he got tired of it pretty soon and turned around to John Peter and says, "Is the' any mystery in your l-l-life?"

"No," says John Peter, kind of grinning. "Why?"

"Well," says Mark, "seems l-like the' ought to be. Jest common, 'ordinary, run-o'-mine f-fellers don't git shot at from ambush."

"But that's what I am. No secrets about me at all. Nothing hid up my sleeves to deceive you."

"It must be," says Mark, "that you don't know about it."

"About what?"

"This here mystery. The's *got* to be one."

"I'm willing," says John Peter, "if you can get any fun out of it. Go ahead and have a mystery, but let's have a good one. What am I—the lost Dauphin?"

"Who's the lost Dauphin?" says Tallow.

Mark kind of eyed him a minute, and then he says to John Peter, "You mustn't mind him when he busts out like that. He don't mean no harm. It's j-j-jest a way he's g-got."

"'Tain't nuther," says Tallow. "I never lost no Dauphin. What I want to know is who did lose one, and what a Dauphin is, anyhow."

"The Dauphin," says Mark, "was a b-b-boy."

"Oh!" says Tallow. "Suthin' like Charlie Ross?"

"Kind of," says Mark, "only d-d-different. This one was the son of the king of F-France."

"Oh, him!" says Tallow, just like he knew all about it. "And you got an idea John Peter is the son of the king of France? What makes you think so?"

"Don't he l-l-look like it?" says Mark. And then, "By jing! let's pertend he is the D-d-d-dauphin. That's a good game."

"You'll have to call me Your Majesty," says John Peter, "and be respectful."

"No, we won't," says Mark, "b-b-because we don't *know* you're the lost Dauphin. We hain't got any idee of it."

"How be we goin' to pertend he's a thing and then not know he's it?" says Plunk. "It can't be done."

"We kin p-p-p-pertend we don't know it," says Mark.

"That's double-barreled pretending," says John Peter, "but I'll try anything for once."

"But we got a s-s-suspicion," says Mark.

"We know the's a m-m-mystery about you that we cal'late to p-penetrate."

"Go right ahead," says John Peter. "It's all right with me."

"We b-b-e-c-o-m-e s-s-suspicious you was s-somebody unusual, and it kind of roused up our c-curiosity," says Mark. "On account of your n-n-noble bearin'."

John Peter got up and bowed. "I'm very much obliged," he says. "I didn't know I had a noble bearing."

"You hain't," says Mark. "We're jest p-p-pertendin' it."

"Darn the luck!" says John Peter.

"So," says Mark, "we s-s-start askin' you questions about your b-birth, and if you kin r-r-remember any crowns or p-palaces, or bein' shut up in prisons, or guillotines, or anythin'."

"And what do I say?"

"You jest stick to the truth," says Mark.

"Shoot," says John Peter.

"Where was you born?" says Mark.

"New York City—I guess."

"D-don't you *know*?" Mark asked with a kind of a wrinkle between his eyes.

"Why," says John Peter, "I always took it for granted."

"N-nobody ever t-t-told ye so?"

"Not that I remember."

"Um. . . ." says Mark. "Mighty s-s-suspicious, I call it." He kind of thought it over a spell and then he says, "Who was your pa?"

"His name was John Sense, just like mine."

"What d'ye remember about him?"

"Nothing," says John Peter. "I don't think I ever saw him."

Mark he heaved a deep breath. "There you go," says he, "and you l-l-let on the' wa'n't any mystery about ye."

"There isn't," says John Peter.

"D'ye r-r-remember your ma?"

"No," says John Peter. "I don't remember anybody but Mr. Grecco. He's the first person I remember, and he has always been around. He brought me up and I've lived with him."

"Be you rich?" asked Mark.

"I don't know. I guess we have plenty."

"Yourn or this here Mr. Grecco's?" says Mark.

"I haven't any idea."

"Seems like you hain't got m-much c-c-curiosity about yourself," says Mark.

"Why," says John Peter, "I just sort of went along and took things for granted."

"Bad idee," says Mark. "Does this here Mr. Grecco ever talk about your pa?"



SHE SHOWED US HOW THEY DANCED, BUT NOT ONE OF US LAUGHED A BIT

"Sometimes, but, now you come to mention it, he doesn't say much—except that he hopes I'll grow up to be a man like my father was. I think Mr. Grecco admired my father."

"Um. . . . Speak kind of deferential about him?"

"Why, I can't say. He thought a great deal of him."

"Gits more mysterious all the t-t-time," says Mark.

"Shucks!" says John Peter.

"I cal'late to know a m-mystery when I see one," Mark says, kind of sore. "I guess I been s-studyin' m-mysteries all my life. No, sir. That's where you can't fool me. I'd know a m-mystery if I was to meet it in a d-d-dark cellar."

"All right," says John Peter. "I have no objection."

"Was your pa American?"

"I think so," says John Peter.

"Don't ye know?"

"Why, I couldn't swear to it. But I've always supposed so."

"Then why, if he was American, did he pick out a Sicilian for your g-guardeen?"

"Did he?" says John Peter.

"Hain't Mr. Grecco a Sicilian?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. He never said so."

"What d-d-does he say he is?"

"He never said."

"Perty suspicious," says Mark. "That'll b-b-bear lookin' into. Talks Eye-talian, don't he?"

"Yes."

"And you do, too?"

"Yes."

"Who taught ye?"

"Mr. Grecco. I could always speak Italian. I learned when I was learning to talk."

"L-l-look at that, now," says Mark. "Have l-l-lots of Eye-talian friends in New York?"

"Never one," says John Peter. "Mr. Grecco is the only Italian I know—if he is one."

"Isn't he?" says Mark.

"Why, I guess so. I've always taken it for granted he was."

"And you n-n-never mingled with no others?"

"Never."

"Did ye *avoid* 'em?"

"Avoid them? That's hard to say. We lived in a part of the city where there were none, and certainly we never went looking for them, but I can't say we went out of our way to keep from seeing any."

"I b-b-bet Mr. Grecco did, only you didn't know it."

"Possibly," says John Peter.

"I b-b-bet he was scairt of Eye-talians," says Mark.

"I don't think Mr. Grecco was ever afraid of anything," says John Peter. "He wouldn't be afraid of the whole Italian nation if they were lined up in a row."

"Not for himself, mebbby, but for you. That's the idee. He had to p-p-pertect you from your enemies, so he hid you away."

"He never," says John Peter. "I've always gone around like anybody else. I never hid in my life."

But Mark jest kind of grinned, and says that maybe if you hide your money in a clock that the money don't know it, but jest takes it for granted the clock is the right place for it to be.

"Did he talk a lot about Sicily?" Mark asked.

"Never," says John Peter.

"That," says Mark, "p-p-proves he was bein' s-s-secret about it."

"Or," says John Peter, "that he wasn't interested in it at all."

"No," says Mark, kind of stubborn. "I bet you'll find he didn't t-talk about it deliberate,

and if you got to talkin' about it he would s-s-switch you off'n the subject."

"I never got to talking about it," says John Peter. "I hardly heard of it until we started for here."

"What made you s-s-start?"

"I've no idea. Just came traveling."

"No, siree," says Mark. "S-s-suthin' important happened that made it n-necessary for Mr. Grecco to fetch you here, even if the' was danger in it. He had to take the r-r-risk, because it was plumb *n-necessary* for you to be here."

"You *have* got an imagination," says John Peter, kind of admiring.

"You n-n-never solve no m-m-mysteries without it," says Mark.

I happened to be looking back up the amphitheater and all at once I kind of jumped and pinched Mark's arm.

"Look!" says I in a whisper. "Look careful."

"W-where?" says he.

"Up to the left," says I.

He looked, and sure enough he saw what I did. It was just part of a head with an eye in it, sticking around the corner of a rock. Sure

as shooting there was a man watching us like a cat watches a mouse hole.

“Duck!” says Mark, and he give John Peter a shove that sent him head over heels behind a pile of stones.

CHAPTER SIX

YOU can bet we ducked and stayed ducked, because not even Mark Tidd wanted to take any chances with a Sicilian when he was hiding behind a stone. Of course we didn't know much about Sicilians then, and we hadn't any idea what a fine lot of folks most of them are. We played safe, you can bet. I know I scrouged so tight to my big rock that I scrubbed the buttons off of my coat.

"Well," says John Peter, "what now?"

"You guess," says Mark.

"Did he have a gun?" I wanted to know.

"D-d-didn't see any," says Mark.

"Maybe," says Tallow, "he's jest spyin'."

"I'm getting sore," says John Peter. "What's this all about, anyhow? I never had any stuff like this happen to me before, and I don't like it."

"Neither would I," says Mark.

John Peter looked pretty mad. "I'm going to grab that fellow and ask him what he means by it," he says. "Why don't they go after some of you fellows? Why pick on me?"

"N-n-none of us is the lost Dauphin," says Mark.

"I'm going to find out," says John Peter; and he would have stood up and started out, but Mark grabbed him by the coat tails and hauled him back. "Hain't you s-s-satisfied with havin' h-holes in your hat?" says he. "It l-looks like you wouldn't be contented till you had 'em in your h-h-head."

"Mebby," says I, "we could Injun up on the feller. If he kin spy on us, mebbly we kin spy right back again."

Mark sat a minute kind of thinking, and then he says: "It's John Peter this f-f-feller's interested in, not us. I don't b'lieve any of us 'u'd git h-hurt if we didn't m-meddle with suthin'."

"But," says I, "you're allus meddlin'."

"And," says Mark, "the c-c-chances is he don't know we s-s-seen him."

"What's he think we ducked down fur?" I wanted to know.

"Cat's fur to make ——" says Plunk, but, spy or no spy, I just stood up and reached over and socked him. I can stand about so much and no more, and I had all the cat's fur to make kittens' britches I could use. I was mad. And

when I socked Plunk he got mad, too, and up he jumped and socked me.

Well, the first anybody knew we were at it good right down in the open space in front of where the stage used to be. Plunk and me hadn't had a fight since we left America and it felt pretty good. I guess we both needed it, and nobody else objected.

"Gladiators!" Mark says. "Go to it, gladiators!"

I didn't have time to figger whether I was a gladiator in a Roman arena or what, because when Plunk starts in to fight he don't do nothin' else but fight. I forgot all about spies and John Peter and everybody else and kind of concentrated on the business in hand, as you might say.

Well, we trompled and stomped and walloped and whanged, and I give him a daisy on the nose that made him wish he'd tackled somebody else; but right after he banged me one on the eye that made me wish I hadn't tackled anybody at all. And then we clinched and went down, and the next I knew Plunk was setting on my stummick. But I heaved him off and got to sit on his stummick, and so on and so forth. It was a dandy fight, and it plumb ruined two

suits of clothes, to say nothing of a couple of faces.

"Got enough?" says I.

"No," says Plunk. "Have you?"

"No," says I.

"You're licked," says he.

"Licked yourself," says I.

So that was that, and we had to go at it all over again. I don't know how long we kept at it, but pretty soon I heard Mark Tidd say, "Time!"

I was willing to stop and take a rest, and I guess Plunk was, too, so we kind of let go of one another and sat back and panted and dug dirt out of our ears.

"M-much obleeged," says Mark.

"What fur?" says I.

"Cat's fur to make ——" says Plunk.

Well, sir, I jest dived at him, but Mark Tidd he sat on me so sudden it knocked all the wind out of me and made me feel like a ten-story building had caven in on my chest.

"It was a b-b-bully fight," says he, "and it come in m-mighty handy."

"How handy?" says Plunk. "This rooster up and socked me, and there wan't nothin' handy about it a-tall."

"He says cat's fur to make kittens' britches

to me," says I, "and that's suthin' I won't endure from nobuddy."

"You will from me," says Plunk, who is a terrible stubborn fellow.

"S-s-shut up!" says Mark. "You been f-f-fightin' twenty minutes now, and that's enough. It's a draw. You come out tie. And it c-c-created a diversion."

"It done what?" says Plunk.

"It t-took the mind of the s-spy off'm his business," says Mark. "Yes, sir, he got p-plumb interested in the American way of f-f-fightin' and didn't 'tend to his knittin'. So I jest kind of s-s-sneaked back and around behind him 'thout bein' seen, and I got a good, square look at him. He didn't have no gun nor n-nothin'. He was jest a-spyin'."

"What'd he look like?" says Tallow.

"He was a h-h-hunchback," says Mark. "Jest a l-little feller."

"A kid?" says I.

"Nope," says Mark. "A man."

"What," says John Peter, "has a hunchback got to do with me?"

"That," says Mark, "is what we got to f-f-find out."

"You'd know him again if you saw him?"

"I cal'late this p-place hain't overcrowded

with hunchbacks," says Mark. "Anyhow, I figger I'd know that f-face on a dark night."

"Then," says John Peter, "we'll lay for him and make him tell us."

"Huh!" says Mark, kind of scornful-like.

"What's the matter with that?" says John Peter.

"'Tain't s-scientific," says Mark. "If we had a d-dungeon with torturin' machinery, why, all right. But we hain't. We can't p-put him to the question. No, sir, we got to go at this *right*."

"How is right?" says John Peter.

"Wa-al," says Mark, "I've read me a lot of b-books, and none of 'em ever got any place jest by goin' up and askin' questions. No, siree bob! You got to s-sneak up on 'em. You got to be kind of subtle and everythin'."

"I'm willing," says John Peter.

"Now," says Mark, "it s-stands to reason this hunchback hain't workin' for himself."

"Maybe," says John Peter.

"No, sir, he hain't," says Mark. "S-somebody set him on. So we got to be careful. If we was to go up to this f-feller and say anythin' it would p-put him on his guard. He don't know I s-s-seen him. So he won't be

s-s-suspicious. And that gives us the best of it."

"How?"

"Why, he won't dream we're watchin' him, and he'll go around natural-like. He won't try to hide or to dodge us, and we kin keep an eye on him and find out where he goes and who is his b-boss. Then when we git to know who he reports to, we kin go ahead."

"Sounds sensible," says John Peter.

"Had enough f-f-fightin'?" says Mark.

I looked at Plunk and he looked at me, and we both kind of grinned. You could tell by the looks of us that we'd had all the fighting we needed for that day. Anybody who wanted any more would have been a hog.

"In another five minutes I'd 'a' had you licked," he says.

"Not in another five days," says I, "and if you think so ——"

"S-save it till we need it ag'in," says Mark. "Neither of you ever l-licked the other one yit. Now kind of dust off. Neither of ye's fit to be seen. We better s-s-sneak on the hotel and clean ye up."

So we did that, and we didn't look so awful bad except for my eye and Plunk's nose, and then we went out to hunt for hunchbacks. If

it had been donkeys there wouldn't have been any trouble, because they were thicker than fleas. But we did see him that day down on the Corso. We were standing in front of an antique shop run by an Englishman, and we were talking to the young fellow that clerked for him. All of a sudden this hunchback came out of a kind of an alley and walked along. Well we saw a couple of people draw back, sort of, and the hunchback kind of sneered, and the people he passed near stuck out their hand with the little finger and first finger straight and the others folded up.

"What's the idee of that?" says I.

The clerk, who was a Sicilian himself, though he was all educated and could speak English good and everything, looked kind of uncomfortable.

"They make the sign of the horns at him," says he.

"What for?" says Mark.

"It is against the evil eye," says he.

"This here hunchback's got the evil eye?" says Mark.

"It is said so."

"He looks it," says Mark. "Who is he?"

"He is not of Taormina."

"S-s-stranger, eh?"

"Sometimes he comes, but not often."

"Where's he l-live?"

"In Rendazza," says the clerk.

"Rendazza, eh? Um. . . . What's his business?"

"It is said he makes spells," says the clerk, kind of looking over his shoulder like he was nervous.

"Um. . . ." says Mark. "A kind of a he-witch, eh?"

"It is said."

"And f-f-folks is afraid of him?"

"He is one to avoid."

"I bet you," says Mark. "But all the same I'd like to see him work some m-m-magic."

The clerk kind of shivered. "It is not the good magic—not that one's. It is black magic."

"Didn't know the' was two kinds," says Mark.

"Say," says Plunk, "you listen here, Mark. I hain't goin' to do no monkeyin' with witches."

I kind of snickered.

"Go ahead and laugh," says he. "I know the' hain't none in Wicksville, but this here place is Sicily. I guess the' could be witches here if they wanted to. And I hain't takin' any chances."

"Yes," says Tallow, "look at all the houses

with charms over the doors to keep off the evil eye and sich. I bet they wouldn't have 'em if they didn't need 'em."

"Well," says Mark, "we've had a lot of interestin' t-times, off and on, and seen some p-perty mean p-people, and had some adventures. But we hain't never been up against magic."

John Peter laughed. "Do you think they are going to bewitch me now?"

"I bet you they t-t-try," says Mark.

"You don't believe that nonsense," says John Peter.

"I don't b-b-b'lieve nothin'," says Mark, "but I hain't takin' no chances."

"Maybe I'd better get me some sort of charm," says John Peter with a grin.

The clerk looked at him kind of solemn. "If this hunchback is an enemy, then I would obtain for myself a strong charm of white magic."

"Well, I'll be darned!" says John Peter. "Where would I get it?"

"From a wise woman," says the clerk.

"Where is one?" says John Peter.

"There is Donna Vanna," says the clerk. "She looses but never binds. She is a Christian. I think she speaks with the little people."

"The l-l-little people?" says Mark. "Do you mean fairies?"

"It may be so," said the clerk.

Well, that was enough for me. I walked away and the rest followed. "Say," says I, "what kind of a place have we got to where civilized folks talk about magic and spells and fairies?"

"This," says Mark Tidd, "is Sicily."

"Looks like it," says I.

CHAPTER SEVEN

YOU know Sicily is an awful superstitious place, and all full of magic and fairies and charms and incantations, and a body gets so he almost believes in it himself. If you have a headache some old woman cures it with a charm, and if you get sick it is because somebody has worked some wicked magic over you, and I guess the worst magic of all is what they call the "substitutes of persons." Which was the one we had worked on us, and it led to a lot of other things, I can tell you. Why, if we hadn't found a "substitute," no telling how the whole mix-up would have come out, because we never would have met old Donna Vanna, who was a wise woman and well acquainted with fairies. Yes, sir, the fairies used to come and see her almost every night, and she knew more magic than Houdini, though it wasn't exactly the same kind.

It was after we left that antique shop where the clerk told us about this hunchback and what kind of a fellow he was. We went back to the hotel and down into John Peter's room.

He decided he wanted to change his tie, because he was awful fussy about ties. Not that he was a dude, you understand, but he did like to look pretty neat. Well, he opened up a drawer and shoved in his hand, and then he hauled it out quick and stuck his finger in his mouth.

"What ails ye?" says Mark.

"Something stuck me," says he, and he dragged out a lot of ties and handkerchiefs and then a funny-looking thing that he held in his hand and stared at.

"Now where in tunket did that come from?" he says.

"What is it?" says Mark.

"A lemon," says John Peter, "and it's stuck all full of nails like a pin-cushion."

"Huh!" says Mark, and he kind of scowled. "L-lemme see."

So he took a look, and sure enough, it was a lemon, and all jammed full of nails and pins so that you could hardly see the skin.

"Funny place to keep nails," says I. "The juice'll rust 'em."

"If," says Mark, "it's what I t-t-think it is, the f-feller that stuck in the nails hain't wor-ryin' about r-rust."

"What is it?" says John Peter.

"L-let's show it to Andrea Zambo," says

Mark. So we went upstairs to where Andrea was in his little office, and Mark nods to him and asks if he is busy, and Andrea grins and says he is never busy when the young gentlemen come to see him. So Mark holds out the lemon and says, "Ever s-s-see anythin' like this?"

Well, sir! Andrea like to of fallen over backwards, and he got kind of yellow and crossed himself and made the sign of the horns and did everything but throw a cat fit.

"A grasshopper has looked on thee!" he said in a sort of a whisper.

"I don't care," says John Peter, "if a pollywog has looked at me."

"He don't mean a real g-g-grasshopper," says Mark. "It's the Sicilian way of talkin' about the evil eye."

"*Si! Si!*" says Andrea. "It is of the evil one. Of the brute beast. A *fattura*, young gentlemen. Eh, this is a matter of bad people. Take it away. Now may San Pancranziu hold me in his keeping."

"I thought so," says Mark. "It's one of them things they call a 's-s-substitute for a p-person.'"

"What's that?" says John Peter.

"Black magic," says Mark. "The one that

uses the magic makes a doll out of wax, or out of r-r-rags, and p-pokes it full of p-pins or nails. Or he just t-takes a l-lemon like this. The idee is the m-magician pertends the lemon is *you*, and the nails and p-pins is runnin' into your vitals."

"Gosh!" says John Peter.

"And they f-f-fetch it and hide it near you, and then you t-t-take sick with gripin' pains in your s-stummick and die."

"Rats!" says John Peter.

"I'm j-just tellin' you what these here Sicilians b-believe," says Mark.

"And mebbly it's so," says Plunk, kind of shaky. "You can't never tell what'll happen in sich a country."

"May he sicken of an ailment in the bowels," says Andrea. "To him a bent back and a heavy load. May the hens never lay and the bread refuse to rise."

"Who?" says Mark.

"The one who sends this to the signore."

"What," says Mark, "had we b-better do about it?"

"There is the white magic," says Andrea, kind of hopeful. "The magic that is from God to loose and not to bind. Oee! Bad peo-

ple do these things; witches that should die like dogs."

"Fiddlesticks!" says John Peter.

"I would make haste to Donna Vanna," says Andrea, "putting myself under the protection of the saints as I went."

"Who," says Mark, "is Donna Vanna?"

"She is a wise woman," says Andrea, "and of great age. Also she is said to be under the protection of the 'ladies.' "

"What ladies?" says John Peter.

"He means the f-fairies," says Mark.

"Let's go see her," says John Peter. "It might be fun."

"She possesses the 'tresses,' " says Andrea.

"Where is she?" says John Peter. So Andrea told us where to find her and off we went, carrying our lemon.

We found the old woman sitting on her doorstep almost entirely surrounded by chickens, and it was lucky John Peter could talk Italian, because she couldn't say a word of English. She was terribly old and had a great wad of hair wound and wound around her head under a handkerchief, and the brightest eyes you ever saw. She was a smart-looking old lady, I can tell you. Well, John Peter spoke to her and she nodded and smiled. It was afterwards he

told us what they said, but I'll tell you just like I listened to it then.

"We have come to you about this," says John Peter, holding out the lemon.

She took it in her long, skinny fingers and poked it and turned it over and nodded her head a lot of times. "Ehu! You come to old Gna Vanna, eh? The boys from far across the seas where trains run underground with great roarings and rumblings. I know. I know all things. I know even that to be the truth." She got up. "For a matter of importance such as this," she said, "we go inside. There are many curious eyes."

She shooed a couple of hens out of chairs and wiped them with her apron, and we sat down, and she smiled kind of amiable, and John Peter says polite-like, "Gna Vanna, you have the longest hair I ever saw."

She stood up kind of proud and took off the head handkerchief, and then she undid her hair so that two long tails of it hung down to the ground. It didn't look like hair, but kind of like matted rope, and she says: "It is the *trizzi*—the tresses. You are young and you are strangers from a great distance, so I will make it clear to you."

"We shall be grateful," says John Peter.

"The tresses," she says, "mark one as under the protection of the Women from Outside. When I was but a babe in the cradle the fingers of the little ladies tangled these locks, and from that day to this neither brush nor comb has touched them."

"What would happen if you cut them off?"

"I should die," says Donna Vanna. "Si. In the night I awake many times and the room glows with light. I look. I see twenty-four of the little ladies dancing and talking with their tiny voices." She showed us how they danced, but not one of us laughed a bit. "And so you come to me for a *razioni* against this witchcraft."

"Yes, Mother Vanna," says John Peter.

She looked at him close and then closer, and says, kind of queer, "It is well that one with eyes such as yours should come to me. Ehu! And who has done this wicked thing?" She held out the *fattura*.

"We suspect a hunchback from Rendazza," says John Peter.

"Ah, may accident overtake him! Give into my hands something you wear."

So John Peter took off the tie he had put on, and she held it in her hands, and then she commenced to pull the nails out of the lemon one by

one and to recite some kind of a charm very fast. It was so fast that John Peter could not understand a word of it. Then she took salt and put it in her palm and stirred it around and around with her right forefinger, and then she recited a lot more. "It is necessary to know the proper words," she said, looking up at us sharply. "I know them all—for every occasion. . . . But my magic is of God. Am I a Christian person, or am I not? Sometimes there is a tiny white dog that comes and lies upon my knees. None else can see this dog even if they be in the same room. But never do my charms fail when my eyes have seen him."

"I hope you've seen him today," says John Peter.

She nodded, and then she ended up with something about the Sacred Beheaded Dead, and let on to John Peter that he needn't worry about the lemon any more, because she had destroyed all its power to do any harm.

"Do you tell fortunes?" says John Peter.

She shook her head. "I am a wise woman. I know the magic of loosing, but never of binding. But who can look into the future? Perhaps San Pancranziu. I do not know. . . . Many things have my eyes seen, and much do I remember. Aha! . . . There was a babe in its

cradle with eyes such as yours, signore, aye, and fear and flight! And death! There was also death. *Si, Si.* Gna Vanna saw, and lives to remember. . . . But where is the Donkey-lifter?" She paused.

Almost every peasant in Sicily has some nickname like that: the Grasshopper-eater, or the Fox, or some such name.

"Who is the Donkey-lifter?" says John Peter.

"You should know. Aye, and the Crooked One should know. And those others who watch and watch with eyes that never sleep, and follow, though it be over oceans and over mountains. *Si. Si.* Old Vanna is wise. It is well you have come to see her. But this Donkey-lifter—it is well if he also comes. You will bear him my word."

"But I don't know him," says John Peter.

Gna Vanna smiled queerly. "For all that," she said, "you shall tell him and he will come."

"Mother Vanna," said John Peter, "if you know so many things, can you tell me why a man shot at me the other day?"

She opened her eyes wide. "Ha! So soon! . . . The open eyes are sharp to see. It may be I could tell you why, but I do not think it would please San Giusipuzzu. It is the busi-

ness of the Donkey-lifter. But now you should go, to come again when you would give an old woman pleasure. But go not into lonely places, and beware of the Crooked One."

"You bet," says John Peter, and he reached into his pocket for money; but Gna Vanna shook her head.

"Not from the babe in its cradle," she says. "Not from the little one with the eyes of sloe berries. But when the time comes, then, perhaps, a spot of comfort and warmth, and meal in the bin, and a bit of wood for the fire. We shall see."

So we went out all charmed up with magic and safe from punctured lemons, and John Peter repeated over the conversation, which was pretty interesting to us. Mark would like to have known more about how the magic worked and to have learned the words to the incantations, but what interested him most was what Gna Vanna said about the babe in the cradle, and fear and flight, and about the Donkey-lifter.

"It wa'n't all m-m-magic," says Mark. "She knows suthin'."

"How? She never saw me before."

"I bet you she thinks she has," says Mark, "and I b-bet you she's right, too."

"Rats!" says John Peter.

"And who's this here Donkey-lifter?" says Mark.

"No idea."

"He had s-s-suthin' to do with that fear and f-f-flight," says Mark. "John Peter, I wisht you'd t-try an experiment."

"What is it?"

"Why," says he, "kind of unexpected-like I w-wisht you'd call Mr. Grecco by that nickname. Call him Donkey-lifter."

"He'd think I was crazy."

"You t-t-try and f-find out," says Mark.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“**I** W-W-WANT to find out more about that h-hunchback,” says Mark Tidd.

“I don’t want nothin’ to do with him,” says I, “nor with nobody that fiddles with things like he does—stickin’ a lemon full of nails to kill a body by magic.”

“F-f-fiddlesticks!” says Mark. “That kind of truck might work with a Sicilian, but I b-bet you it won’t work on nobody from Wicksville, Michigan. No, siree. I got to know more about that f-feller.”

“What about him?” says I.

“What he’s up t-to,” says Mark, “and who he’s w-workin’ for. It s-stands to reason he hain’t doin’ what he’s doin’ for himself. He’s hired. The’s suthin’ about John Peter that makes somebody want to git rid of him, and it wouldn’t be no p-peasant like the hunchback. It’s somebody important.”

“What would anybody want to git rid of him fur?” says I.

“What does anybody want to git rid of anybody f-fur?” says Mark.

"I dunno," says I. "I never wanted to git rid of anybody."

"But if you did want to," says he, "what would it b-b-be fur?"

"No idee," says I.

"It 'u'd be money," says he.

"Mebby," says I, "but has John Peter got any money? And if he has, how would gittin' rid of him give it to this hunchback?"

"I t-t-tell ye the hunchback's jest one of these here tools you read about in books. He's a hired h-hand like you might say, workin' by the d-d-day."

"Mebby by the piece," says I, "at so much a murder."

"No tellin'," says Mark. Then he kind of scratched his chin and looked off at Mount Etna and wrinkled his eyes. "I wonder," says he, "if the Mafia is m-m-mixed up in it."

"What fur?" says I.

"How sh'u'd I know?" he says, kind of impatient. "Them's the things we got to f-f-find out. I wisht Mr. Grecco would tell what he knows."

"Maybe," says I, "he don't know nothin'."

"You b-bet he does," says Mark, "and I bet you that old w-w-witch knows suthin' too. She wa'n't jest prophesyin'. No, sir! That old

woman knows s-s-suthin'. And what for is John Peter here a-tall?"

"Same reason as us," says I. "To see."

"Then," says Mark, "why hain't s-s-somebody a-shootin' at us and a-sendin' us black magic?"

"It jest happened so," says I.

"Things don't jest h-h-happen so, not in this here world," says he. "They're p-planned."

"I s'pose you plan it," says I, "when you stub your toe and fall down and tear the knee out of your pants."

"Aw," says he, "you hain't got no m-more idee of arguin' than a cow."

"Who's arguin'?" says I.

"You be," says he.

"I hain't," says I.

"Well," says he, "m-mebby you're right. I cal'late you be. You're jest talkin' through your hat."

"Aw," says I, "let's go for a walk."

"Where?" says he.

"Down through the gardens and to the road," says I, "and see what that part of the town looks like. We hain't ever seen it."

So we got up and walked down through the gardens and come to a gate in the wall that let us out into a road that run between two high

walls that had doors in them ever so often. I guess these doors went into the back yards of the houses that was on the side of the hill and looked over the water.

We walked along a ways and come to a big stretch of wall and we could just see the top of a house inside.

"That," says Mark, "is where the Duke of Rendazza l-lives. The one that jest died."

"Then he don't live there much any more," says I.

"Huh!" says he. "I wisht we could s-s-see inside."

"It says at the hotel you can go in certain days and see the gardens," says I.

"What days?"

"I dunno. We kin look."

"M-mebby it's today," says he. "Anyhow, we can't do no w-w-worse'n git k-kicked out fur t-tryin'."

"You mean jest walk in?"

"To be sure."

"What, into a duke's garden?"

"What's the m-matter with that?" says he.

"Nothin'," says I, "if you kin git away with it. But I don't hanker to git beheaded nor nothin'."

"It hain't stylish to b-behead no more," says he.

"You'd think it was," says I, "to listen to all that talk of Donna Vanna's about the Sacred Beheaded Dead."

"That was jest m-m-magic or suthin'," says he, "or m-mebby she was talkin' about s-saints or martyrs."

"I don't cal'late to be neither," says I. "But I'll take a chance on the garden if you want to. Here's the door. What do we do—ring the bell or jest open it and walk in?"

"That," says he, "d-d-depends on whether it's l-locked. When a door's locked it's allus b-best to ring—if you hain't got no key."

"Try it," says I.

So he tried it, and it wasn't locked. We pushed it open kind of cautious and peeked. Nobody was in sight, but the gardens with terraces and fountains and flowers and all looked pretty lovely, so we up and pushed the door farther, and nothing happened, so we stepped in.

"Better go kind of sneakin'," says I, "just in case."

"Sure," says he. "We're s-s-spies."

"For who?" says I.

"For the king," says he. "This here duke has conspired ag'in' the p-p-peace of the realm,

and he's b-besieged and we're sneakin' in to f-f-find out how many soldiers he's got and all."

"Oh!" says I. "And I know what happens to spies, too."

"What?" says he.

"They hang 'em," says I.

"Not," says he, "till they k-k-ketch 'em."

"Hush!" says I. "I heard a door open."

We scrouged down back of a pond all growing up with papyrus that was brought to Italy from Egypt when the Greeks were running the country a couple of hundreds of thousands of years ago, and squinted at the house. It was a middle-aged man that come out, and he was thin and straight, with a kind of spiked whiskers and a lot of importance. He kind of looked like he might be a duke himself, only the place was just out of dukes. Mebby he was some kind of an assistant duke, or vice-duke—like a vice-president, you know. His nose was hooked and his eyebrows come way down over his eyes. Even when he wasn't scowling he looked like he was, and when he really set in to scowl he did an awful terrifying job of it. As soon as I saw him I was kind of sorry I ever come there, and wished I was away. He wasn't the kind of a man you wanted to get caught by.

Not by a jugful. He looked like he would be mean.

G-g o o d-t-tempered-lookin' feller," s a y s Mark.

"Hush!" says I. "I'm scairt."

"What for?" says he. "We hain't doin' n-nothin'."

"We're in his garden."

"'Tain't hisn," says Mark. "It's the duke's."

"The duke's dead," says I.

"No," says he. "A duke's d-d-dead, but the's allus a duke. As soon as one up and dies another gits to be duke."

"How?" says I.

"Just by b-bein' born that way," says Mark. "Somebody's allus got to be d-duke."

"Mebby this is him," says I.

"No," says he.

"How d'ye know?" says I.

"Because n-nobuddy knows who the duke is, or suthin'. I didn't jest git the idee, but the f-feller that claims to be the d-duke hain't admitted to be it yit."

"Why?" says I.

"I d-dunno," says he.

"Shut up!" says I. "He's comin' closer."

He was. He come right along the path and stopped not thirty feet away and sat on a bench

like he was waiting for somebody. Well, he didn't have to wait long, for we heard the door in the wall open up, and looked that way through the papyrus we was hiding amongst. I wished it was stone six foot thick when I see who came in, for it was the hunchback.

Mark grunted kind of funny, and I socked him in the stummick with my elbow to make him keep quiet. He didn't like it. He never likes to get hit in the stummick. I guess because he's got so much of it.

The hunchback come along the path and see the man with the hook nose and the spike beard, and he kind of bowed and the man nodded and says something in Italian, and then they talked and talked, but we couldn't understand a word of it. Mark was scowling like he was terrible mad, and I bet he was. He gets awful mad when his curiosity gits to itching, and it must have itched to beat the band right then.

Mine didn't. I wasn't curious a speck. What I was was uncomfortable. I didn't like that place. I would have liked any other place you could mention, so long as the hunchback and the man with the hook nose wasn't there. But Mark he sat and strained his ears as if listening hard would make him understand Italian. It's like Mr. Tidd when he's talking to any for-

eigner. He thinks if he yells loud he can make the man understand. But it don't work. I've tried it myself. They don't understand English yelled any better than they do English whispered.

Well, they talked for maybe twenty minutes and then the hunchback walked off towards the back gate again, and the man with the hook nose followed him and locked the gate. I saw Mark nod his head like that was interesting. But we didn't move. We waited till the man was back in the house, and then I says, "I've seen enough gardens for today."

"Me, too," says Mark.

"Let's git," says I.

"He l-left the gate unlocked so's the hunchback could git in," says Mark.

"What of it?" says I.

"It's how we happened to git in. Jest l-l-luck. We got here the right time."

"I don't see as it's sich terrible luck," says I.

"It is," says he, "and if you was a d-d-detective you'd know it."

"I thought we was s-s-spies."

"Detectives is a kind of spy," says he.

"And we're detectives now?"

"Yes," says he.

"I wisht you wouldn't change so often," says I. "It makes my head buzz."

"It don't t-t-take much to do that," he says.

By this time we were at the door, or gate, or whatever you call it, and got it unlocked and hypered out into the road. We couldn't lock it again, of course, but that didn't matter a cent to me. I didn't even try. All I did was jest show Mark how fast I could go up a road.

We didn't stop till we were in the hotel again, and then he sat down and commenced to cluck, and his eyes was shining and he looked like he was happy about something.

"What's bitin' you?" says I.

"Things is m-m-movin'," says he.

"What things is movin' where?" says I.

"The mystery," says he. "Now who's the hook-nose m-m-man?"

"Dunno," says I.

"And what's the h-hunchback r-reportin' to him?"

"How should I know?"

"Gosh! I wisht I could s-s-speak Eyetalian," he says. "We'd be a lot f-further ahead. What I bet you is that we j-jest seen the boss."

"What boss?"

"The one that's runnin' it."

"Runnin' what?"

"The p-p-plot," says he.

"I didn't know the' was one. Is it a real plot or are we pertendin' ag'in?"

"I cal'late," says he, "it's a perty real plot. And," he says, like he was tickled to death, "here we b-be, right in the m-middle of it."

CHAPTER NINE

IN-NEVER got a good close look at a volcano," says Mark Tidd.

"I dunno's I care to," says I, "not when it's shootin' off."

"This one hain't," says he.

"You mean Etna?"

"Yes," says he.

"Where d'ye go to git a squint at it?" says I.

"They say Rendazza is the place," says he.

"It's a town that's closest to the m-mountain."

"I wouldn't want to live there," says I.

"We kin d-drive there in a day and git b-back. The hotel'll p-put up our lunch."

"It was a volcano," says Mr. Tidd, "that destroyed Pompey-eye. And Pompey-eye was all full of Romans."

"I guess the's been Romans in Rendazza, too," says Mark. "Etna's a b-bigger volcano'n what Vesuvius is, and mebbly it's d-destroyed more Romans."

"What I'm hankerin' to do," says Mr. Tidd, "is to see some Romans that hain't never been destroyed a-tall. I come over here cal'latin'

to git a view of some togas and lictors and senators and whatnot, and I hain't seen a one. Looks to me like this country's all gone to the dogs so fur's Romans is concerned. Hain't nothin' but ruins."

"Why," says Mark, "'tain't but a little ways down the c-coast to Syracuse where the Romans d-done all the f-f-fightin' and where that Greek feller Archimedes burned up a f-fleet with burnin' glasses and rigged up contraptions that lifted a hull s-ship out of the water and let her drop kerslap!"

"Dew tell!" says Mr. Tidd. "The' hain't nothin' like that goin' on there now, I bet you. Every place we go we git to when it's all over."

"T-trouble with pa is," says Mark, "he went and got born about t-t-two thousand year after everythin' he is interested into is d-d-dead and buried."

"Anyhow," says Mr. Tidd, "I got an idee I'd like to look over this here volcano."

"Let's go now," says I. "It's early."

"And invite John Peter," says Mark.

"And Mr. Grecco?"

"To be sure," says he.

So we went and rapped on their door, and John Peter could come, but Mr. Grecco was

busy with something that kept him right there in Taormina.

"Rendazza," says Mr. Grecco in a kind of a queer voice. "Yes, John Peter, you'd better go to Rendazza." He nodded his head a couple of times. "But stay with your friends. Don't wander away. And," he says, "if you see a little man with a hunchback, have nothing to do with him."

"Um. . . ." says Mark, "and how about a f-f-feller with a sharp-pointed b-beard and s-scowlin' eyebrows. A kind of high-class-lookin' f-feller?"

Mr. Grecco looked at Mark for what seemed like a minute, and then he says, "Young man, if you meet such a person, climb into your car and have the driver drive as if an army was pursuing him."

"I cal'late we're gittin' hot," says Mark.

"I beg your pardon," says Mr. Grecco.

"And what," says Mark, "if we m-meet a f-f-feller that's called the Donkey-lifter?"

"Young man," says Mr. Grecco, "where did you hear of the Donkey-lifter?"

"The s-s-same place," says Mark, "that I heard of the night of f-f-fear and f-flight."

"Do you speak Italian?"

"I kin say *oggi* and *quanta costa*," says Mark, "but that's a-all."

"Where did you hear of these things you mention? Did you know of them before you came here?"

"No, sir. Jest kind of p-picked up the information here and t-t-there and p-pieced it together."

"There are things," says Mr. Grecco, "which it is unsafe to know and into which it is perilous to pry."

"The hunchback," says Mark, "was here yestiddy, and him and the m-man with the s-s-spike beard was t-together."

"You saw them?"

"Yes."

Here John Peter got kind of restless and says, "What's all this about, sir?"

"In good time," says Mr. Grecco, "you will know what it is necessary for you to know."

Well, we got into two cars and started off down the mountain and around along the shore for a ways, and then we turned inland. It was a nice drive. We went along valleys with mountains going up on both sides, and we climbed up mountains, and we passed through towns that looked so old they might have come out of the Ark. Why, some of them was so

high up in the air a body would almost have to go up to them in a balloon. And pretty soon we come to a funny-looking country. But everywhere was the smell of lemons in the air and it was awful fragrant and pretty. This new kind of a country we come to was kind of dismal-like. It was all pretty nearly black, and the black was lava out of the mountain. All the walls of the farms was built of blocks of it, and so was the houses and the terraces. And there would be a big stretch where there was nothing but a jumble of lava where it had come flowing down. And dust! Say, you never see such dust. Black and fine, and it got into your eyes and your ears and your hair till you was fit to be tied.

But in amongst it all was lovely green of gardens and fruit trees. Mark said it was a nightmare with a silver lining. We all decided we wouldn't like to live here, and we wondered why folks would keep on living right under Etna when it was apt to up and raise the dickens any minute and kill them and ruin all their farms and houses. But it didn't seem to make any difference. There they stayed and kind of dared Etna to do its worst. Either they was terrible brave folks or they didn't have good common sense.

In one place we drove right out on the lava where it had come down in a stream maybe thirty feet deep, and we could see where it had chewed off half a house and buried other houses, and everything was all twisted and dead and awful-looking. The lava was smoking all over, and you could easy burn your shoes when you walked out on it if you wasn't careful. There was a lot of sulphur around that you could smell when your nose wasn't clogged up with dust, and then, away in the distance was the cone of Etna looking as calm and peaceful as if it never expected to bust out and ruin a whole county.

We got us some good pieces of lava with pretty colors in them made by sulphur and other minerals, and then we drove along to Rendazza. But before we got there we ate our lunch in a field and tried to get acquainted with a couple of dogs that was awful hungry but too frightened to have anything to do with anybody.

Rendazza is an old town and pretty big. There used to be battles around where it was between Normans and other folks, and Saracens fought there, and I guess Greeks and Carthaginians, too. It's a historical kind of a

country wherever you go. I guess most every nation but the Chinese has fought there. Every nation that got to be great around the Mediterranean wanted to own Sicily on account of its being so fertile. It was the granary of the Roman Empire. But that's got nothing to do with John Peter and the mystery that seemed to be tagging him around. Mysteries is always better than history, though I guess there has been a lot of pretty interesting historical mysteries, too. Like the lost Dauphin and other things of that sort.

When we got filled up on boiled eggs and bread and hunks of cheese, we got back into our cars and drove into town. Mr. Tidd he had to look at churches and whatnot, and go prowling around old walls with columns almost buried out of sight in the brickwork. He had a pretty good time, and so did we. But I got more fun out of watching chickens making themselves to home every place you looked. I calculate folks there is fond of poultry because you could see hens perching on balconies outside of the bedroom and sitting inside on the foot of the bed, and making nests in the parlor chairs.

There was a couple of churches with paint-

ings in them, but not anything that got me het up much, and I would have just as soon we didn't come to Rendazza at all. Well, we were just coming out of a church when we saw a large old man, and he didn't have any hat on and his hair was pretty curly and as white as snow. He was big—a lot bigger than Mr. Grecco, and broad across the shoulders, and as straight as a string. He looked like he was pretty old, but I bet he was strong as anything even yet. He had a big face, too, without any mustache or whiskers on it, and it was a fine face to look at. You got the idea right off that there was a lot to this man and that he could boss folks if he wanted to. There was something pretty firm about him, and you know it would take a lot to stop him if he ever got started; but somehow, mixed in with it was a kind sort of a look. There wasn't anything mean or cruel about him, you could tell that.

He stood there on the stone steps all alone, and you could see people look at him out of the corners of their eyes, and once in a while some peasant would sort of tip his hat. First off I figured he was some kind of a nobleman, but he didn't have that kind of a look when you came to study him. No, he looked like a peas-

ant, too, but a mighty important one. He didn't pay any attention to anybody, but just stood and looked across the square like he was thinking about something.

Well, all at once a man came running up the steps and went right over to the big old man and jerked at his sleeve and said something in a whisper. The old man frowned down at him like he didn't understand at first, and then it looked like he listened with a heap of surprise. And then the other man turned and pointed at us.

Well, you could have knocked me over with a feather. Why was he pointing us out? What had we been up to that was interesting to anybody.

"Look!" says I to Mark.

"I b-been l-l-lookin'," says he, stuttering like everything.

The old man looked steady at us and kind of shook his head, and then he turned and walked straight across to where we were; but he didn't pay so much attention to Mr. Tidd and us four fellows as if we weren't there. He just walked right up to John Peter and dropped a great big hand on each of his shoulders and stared into his face. John Peter kind of flushed because he didn't know what to make of such

actions, but he stared right back at the big man. And then the big man said something in Italian and John Peter answered. Afterwards we were told just what was said on both sides, and this is how it was:

"Is it true what they say?" asked the old man.

"I do not know what they say," says John Peter.

"Is your name Giovanpietro?"

"Yes," says John Peter, because that is what the Sicilian of his name is.

"Why do you come to Rendazza?"

"To see the sights."

"It is not a good place for one with such eyes and such a mouth and whose name is Giovanpietro to come."

"Why?"

"Do you assure yourself you do not know?"

"I don't understand what all the fuss is about."

"Ah! . . . Is it the truth and no lie that one fired upon you with a gun?"

"It is."

"That was done without orders, and there shall be a disciplining."

"Are you a policeman?"

"No."

"Or the mayor?"

"I am nothing," says the old man. "Who are these?" He pointed to us.

"Just some people I met in Taormina."

"You did not know them before?"

"I never heard of them a week ago."

"That is to be remembered. They are not concerned. They must take no hurt."

"Why should anybody be hurt?"

"Because it has been ordered," said the old man. "I am not glad. Why must you come here? Why could not those who have you in charge convince themselves you should have remained hidden. None could prove you to be alive."

"I am alive," says John Peter, "and I don't understand what all this mystery is about."

"No. You were over-young. You would remember nothing. But the innocent must suffer with the guilty. Root and branch, that was the order. Let none of that blood remain alive—so it was directed. And yet you come." He paused. "The Donkey-lifter is a bold man. There will be big trouble and grief, and things will happen which might have been averted. . . . And you in your first youth."

At that he kind of sighed like a body who had a hard duty to do and hates to do it, but he didn't say another word. He just turned and walked off, not fast and not slow, and left us standing there gawping after him.

CHAPTER TEN

“WELL,” says Mark when John Peter repeated the conversation to him, “l-l-life hain’t so dull after all. I kind of f-figgered Rendazza was a w-wash-out, but it’s stepped up quite high in my estimation. Now I wonder who this here important-lookin’ f-feller is.”

“I bet,” says I, “the Donkey-lifter would know.”

“And I b-bet,” says Mark, “that one of us’ll call Mr. Grecco the Donkey-lifter where he kin hear it, and he’ll up and cuff us to a peak.”

“He knew me,” says John Peter. “But how does anybody in Rendazza do that? I’m not what you might call acquainted around here.”

“It l-looks,” says Mark, “as if everybody in Sicily knew you—except yourself. You don’t remember no s-s-scenes of your childhood, do you? About men-at-arms, and a room with a t-throne in it, and p-palaces and all? If you don’t, you ought to. Lost Dauphins and sich allus has vague mem’ries and a scratched up locket with the queen’s picture into it.”

"The only jewelry I have," says John Peter, "is a dollar watch, and there isn't even a picture of a Congressman in it."

"It wouldn't run if there was," says Tallow. "Congressmen kin almost keep the United States from runnin', and nobuddy knows *what* one of 'em would do to a clock."

Mr. Tidd, who had been examining a donkey cart, came walking over and says: "I cal'late we better be gittin' home. The hain't much to see here, and not a Roman in the whole ka-boodle. I never see a country with less Romans in it. Mighty disappointin', that's what I say."

"All right," says Mark. "L-let's head for Taormina and git the Dauphin to a p-p-place of safety before the wicked duke and his m-m-minions git their hands onto him. They might take it into their heads to drop him down the hole in Mount Etna."

"I hear tell," says Mr. Tidd, "that that there old Greek or Roman god by the name of Pluto keeps a young gal by the name of Proserpine hid under the mountain, and she can't git out but once a year."

"Wa-al," says Mark, "it l-looks like we was too busy with John Peter's t-troubles to have time to git her out."

So we walked back to the car, and all of us

got in, and we started out of town into the lava country. Maybe we had gone a couple of miles when, all of a sudden, Mark Tidd soaked his elbow into my ribs and says, "Hush!"

"I wasn't makin' a noise," says I. "I never said a word."

"I s-said *hush*," says Mark, "because *hush* is the proper word to s-say when you git right smack into the middle of a conspiracy and go bang-slam ag'in' an emergency."

"Have we done that?" says I.

"We have," says he, "and it l-looks to me l-like a bad one."

"I don't see none," says I.

"You might's well have a couple of glass agates in the f-f-front of your face," says he, "as them things you call eyes."

"I hain't so blind," says I, "but what I kin see anybody as big as you be even in the dusk of the evenin'."

Now Mark ain't what you'd call fond of hav-ing anybody refer to the size of him, and if you do you can most generally expect him to up and whang you with a few words that takes off a piece of your skin. But he never paid the least attention to what I said and I got scairt. Yes, sir, I just bust out in a cold perspiration, because I knew then things was serious. When

Mark Tidd let a thing like that pass, you can bet he had something pretty important on his mind.

“Gosh!” says I. “What’s wrong?”

“A h-heap,” says he. “Shet up and l-l-lemme think.”

He thought so hard you could hear his brains grinding above the noise of the engine, and then, all of a sudden, he leaned over and stopped the driver and motioned him to pull up alongside of the road. When we did that the other car with John Peter and the rest in it came to a stop, too. Mark got right out and motioned us to git out, too.

“John Peter,” says he, “I wisht you’d t-t-tell our drivers to wait here about t-t-ten minutes. I caught a g-glimpse of suthin’ interestin’ we got to see. It’s b-back off the road a ways. We just got to go l-l-look at it—all of us.”

So John Peter told the drivers and they shrugged their shoulders and settled back, and we climbed over a lava wall and got our pants pretty dirty, and walked across a field where nothing was growing till we came to another wall, and we climbed over that into a lemon grove and walked on some more.

“Where we goin’?” says Mr. Tidd. “What you cal’late to see off here?”



THEN I SEE SOMETHING DROP IN FRONT OF HIM AND ROLL AND IT
WAS YELLOW, SO I KNEW IT WAS MARK'S ORANGE

"And how," says I, "did you see it from the car?"

"The car," says Mark, "was the only p-p-place you *could* see it. It was s-s-sittin' in the front seat."

"What you talkin' about?" says I.

"The d-d-driver," says he.

"What about the driver?"

"It wa'n't our d-driver," says Mark. "L-looked kind of like him and all, but our d-driver had on a green tie and this one had on a yaller one. And so I c-come to look clost, and I see they was different people."

"What of it?" says I.

"When you git in the m-middle of a conspiracy," says Mark, "you got to pay attention. If s-somethin' happens you don't understand, why, you got to look out for it. If suthin' s-s-suspicious happens, you got to dodge. Right now we're dodgin' about as active as I kin manage."

"I don't see any sense to it," says John Peter.

"L-lucky for you," says Mark, "you got me along. In another t-t-ten minutes you'd of been k-kidnapped or hid in a dongeon or suthin' disagreeable."

"By whom?"

"Them minions of the wicked duke," says Mark.

"Be we p-pertendin'?" says I.

"We're bein' d-doggone in earnest," says he. "Jest ask yourself: why should anybody s-s-shift chauffeurs on us, eh? Not for fun. No, sir, not when you take it with all the rest that's happened. Suthin's happened to our reg'lar drivers, and others has been put in their places. If that hain't a s-s-suspicious circ'mstance, then I hope I don't git a bite to eat for a week."

"Are you sure?" says John Peter.

Mark just sniffed. "If you don't t-think so," says he, "go on b-back and git in the car. We don't know these roads, do we? No, siree bob, we don't. What if these drivers was to t-turn off some'eres? Would we know it? We wouldn't. And that's what would of happened, and the fust t-thing we knowed, we would all be captured by the wicked duke and clapped slam-bang into a tower with irons onto our legs and be fed through a gratin' by a man-at-arms, and nobuddy would ever know what become of us till our bones was found in a couple of hundred years by somebuddy snoopin' around."

"Gosh!" says Tallow.

"Are you serious?" says John Peter.

"I'm that s-s-serious," says Mark, "that I'm m-makin' tracks over rough country. And I don't dote on c-climbin' on an empty stum-mick."

He stopped and looked back. The car was hid from us by the lemon trees and other things, so Mark he turned off at right angles back the way we come from, and then, in another five minutes of tramping, he turned back to the road. When we come to the wall alongside of it he looked over cautious and in all directions. The cars was out of sight around a bend.

"L-looks safe," says he. "Hyper across."

We hypered. Then we cut back across some pretty rugged country, with Mr. Tidd complaining all the time about a crick in his back. Mark said it would be a lot better to enjoy a crick in the back than a crack over the head, and so we kept on till we came to a mess of rocks and lava, and there we stopped.

"This here," says Tallow, "is a dickens of a place to be."

"It's a l-l-long ways from Wicksville, Michigan," says Mark, "and there hain't any l-lunch counter."

"Be we goin' to camp here permanent?" says Plunk.

"You folks is goin' to s-s-stay here while

Binney and me s-scouts. The main thing is to keep the Dauphin hid. Willin' to come, Binney?"

"I hain't," says I, "but I s'pose I got to. I dunno why you pick on me. I'm scairt. I'm 'most allus scairt. But I can't be much more scairt 'n I be right now, not 'thout dyin' of it. Go ahead," says I, "and do your worst. But remember my pa'll lam you good if you git me all mussed up by robbers or bandits or Mafias or suthin'."

"I got a s-s-skin of my own," says Mark, "that I'm kind of f-fond of. You other f-f-fellers sit tight and don't m-move. Don't even w-wink."

"Look here," says John Peter, "it looks to me like this was my rumpus and I ought to be in it. I'm going with you instead of Binney."

Mark just give him one of them scornful looks of his, as much as to say he was almost bright but hadn't ought to be let out alone, and didn't say nothin' for a spell, but then he says, "That would be about as s-s-sensible as sendin' a di-diamond necklace out to ketch a t-thief."

Well, John Peter he didn't have much to say to that, because I guess he saw the sense of it, and so I didn't get out of going the way I hoped

I would, and Mark kind of let me have a slap on the back that made me feel good. He can do that. He never says much when you do something that satisfies him, but somehow you know it does, and it makes you glad.

We started back for the road, going as cautious as a couple of Pawnee scouts, and Mark says we better be extry cautious because we got to deal with a semi-civilized race that hain't far from bein' simple barbarians, and you can't tell what sich folks will do. I was willin' to be more cautious than that. There wasn't any amount of caution that I wouldn't have used if I'd had it with me. I bet you I didn't breathe for five minutes on end, and that's a world's record. I never got a medal for it. When we got close to the road we went along about a half inch at a time, and I was so full of lava dust you couldn't of got it out of me with a dozen vacuum cleaners in a week.

Then we come to a place where we could see the road and the two cars, and the drivers was standing beside them talking with their backs to us, and looking off across the road where we went in the first place. You could see they was pretty excited and kind of upset. But that didn't mean such a lot, because them Sicilians

can git as excited over a hen layin' an egg as an American could git over an earthquake.

"Where do we go from here?" says I.

"We got to w-w-watch for an opportunity," says he.

"What," says I, "if it don't come."

"Then," says he, "we got to make one."

"I hain't got the right kind of a machine," says I.

Those bogus drivers was making waggles with their arms, and screwing their faces and jabbering fit to kill. I wisht I could of understood what they said, but I couldn't. Anyhow, you could see they was worried 'most to death. Then one of them started helter-skelter across the road to follow our tracks, but the other one didn't go.

"There," says Mark, "is h-half an opportunity. All we got to do now is m-m-manufacture the other half."

"It's the worst half," says I.

"Then," says Mark, "it'll be that much m-more credit if we kin do it."

Which was just like him.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"I'LL bet," says I, "he's loaded down with stilettos and all kinds of stabbin' gadgets. He's sure to be if he's one of them Mafias."

"M-mebby," says Mark.

"We dassen't tackle him," says I.

"Hain't got no intention of t-tacklin' him," says Mark.

"What then?" says I.

"Wisht I knew," says he.

"It can't be done," says I.

"It kin," says he. And then: "You go s-s-sneakin' back and tell the folks not to pay no attention to no n-noises they hear unless there come three hoots like an owl. Then they're to come hyperin' here as f-f-fast as they kin leg it. And you come right b-back."

"What you goin' to do?" I says.

"And f-f-fetch an orange. I guess pa's got one in his pocket. He m-mostly has."

"You're always hungry," says I.

"I don't cal'late to eat this one," says he, kind of dry. "Git a wiggle on you."

So I went and told the rest what Mark said, and came back again as fast as I could. I didn't want to come back and get mixed up in what he was going to do, but there didn't seem to be any good way to get out of it. And I couldn't very well leave him there alone, could I?

When I got back he was sitting like a bump on a log, and he grinned and says soft and cautious, "Git the orange?"

"Yes," says I.

"Got your s-s-s-sling-shot?"

"Sure."

"S-slip down that way about t-two hunderd f-feet and let him have it," says Mark. "Don't l-let him s-see you, but l-let him have it, and then count ten slow and l-let him have it ag'in."

"What'll you be d-doin'?"

"I got a s-sling-shot, too," says he. "Don't be scairt by no n-noises you hear."

"What noises?"

"Any noises," he says. "Now git."

I got and found a good hiding-place a couple of hundred feet down the road, and settled myself and got out my sling-shot. I had some ammunition, too, and I got on one knee and took aim at the Sicilian's hat. Though I say it as shouldn't, I'm about as good a shot with one

of those things as there is in Michigan, and when you say that you cover a whole lot of territory. The shot hit *plop* right on the band of his felt hat and 'most knocked it off. He jumped and turned, and then I guess Mark must have let go, because he clapped his hand to the seat of his pants and let out a yelp and jumped the other way. So I counted ten and give him another belt, and it was on the elbow where he kept his funny bone. But he didn't see anything funny about it the way he acted. He looked like he wanted to turn four different ways at once and was 'most pulling himself to pieces trying to do it. And then Mark let fly another, and then I clipped him on the back of the hand, which is a tender spot, and Mark soaked him on the knee cap. And then I heard a horrid kind of a screech that 'most froze me solid. But I guess it kind of froze the Sicilian, too. I never see a body get so stiff or have his eyes bug out that way. Then I give him another, and there was another screech. Then I see something drop in front of him and roll, and it was yellow, so I knew it was Mark's orange. Right on top of that came another scream, and the Sicilian took one good look at the orange and didn't wait for nothing, but set off to find somebody who

was a long ways off and was in a hurry to see him.

He jumped the wall without ever touching it and disappeared among the lemon trees. Then Mark let out three owl hoots and I made for him.

"J-jack-knife," says he.

"What for?" says I.

"P-puncture the tires of the last car," he says. "Don't waste time. I'll start the front one."

I went at it and haggled some holes in the tires and out came the air, and I called over to Mark, "What was the idee of the orange?"

"Just to cap the climax," says he.

"What climax?"

"Why," says he, "these Sicilians is pretty superstitious, and this t-territory around Mount Etna is apt to be full of spooks and witches and what not. So them shots of ourn and them screeches must 'a' kind of got him perty scairt. But maybe he didn't think it was the evil eye or witchcraft or something, so I took that orange and poked it full of matches and pins and everything, like the lemon John Peter found. I made one of them magic *fatturas* out of it, and when he see that come rollin' out of nowheres right to his feet, he knew the' was

evil spirits and magic, so he jest took his self by the seat of his pants and went away."

"Huh!" says I.

"Here come the rest," says he.

And so they did. Mark hustled them into the car and it was pretty crowded I can tell you, and we started off lickety-split. Mark was driving, and maybe he was a good driver. I don't know. But I didn't like the way he did it, and there was times when I had to give him some advice about turning corners on two wheels and such like. But he didn't pay any attention but kept on as fast as he could go.

We didn't know the roads, but we did know the general direction we had to go in and so we couldn't go very far wrong. We passed through a couple of towns and pretty soon we come to the railroad and the water, and then we turned to the left, and there, up on top of its hills, was Taormina. And you can bet we were glad to see it. We drove up to the hotel and got out and asked Zambo where Mr. Grecco was, and he said he was in the garden. So we went there and found him on a bench.

"Ah," says he, "back again, are you?"

"But we wouldn't have been," says John Peter, "if it hadn't been for Mark Tidd," and he went ahead and told his guardian all about

it, and Mark put in and told how I helped do the shooting. Mr. Grecco didn't let his face change a bit, not to look mad or worried or anything, and all he says was: "It ended fortunately. We are indebted to you, Mark Tidd."

"Say, Mr. Grecco," says Mark, "who is the big old man that looks like a lion that everybody in Rendazza's so p-polite to. And who says a thing like this: 'The Donkey-lifter is a bold man. There will be big trouble and grief, and things will happen that might have been averted.' Who's sich a man, Mr. Grecco?"

"A large man with white hair? Broad of shoulder and with a head like a lion? Ah. . . . Once I knew such a man—and he was indeed a man." He nodded his head. "Yes, Mark Tidd, you have seen a man. Do not forget him."

"I hain't likely to," says Mark. "What's his name?"

"He is called," said Mr. Grecco, "Cola the Rock-breaker."

"I bet," says Mark, "he could do it with his fists."

"He was not unfriendly," said John Peter. "He acted as if he were sorry for something."

"He is not unfriendly, neither is he friendly. Cola the Rock-breaker walks the middle road,

nor does he turn to the right nor to the left without reason. But when he turns *with* reason, then a thing happens that men remember."

"I bet you," says Mark Tidd, "he'd g-give a feller a square deal."

"He never acts hastily. But even the most just man may be blinded by plots and lies. Yes, even Cola the Rock-breaker cannot always know the truth by looking at it with the naked eye."

"It l-looks to me," says Mark, "like John Peter better stay p-perty clost to home."

Mr. Grecco nodded. "And fifteen years is a long time," he said slowly. "In fifteen years men might forget."

This was meat for Mr. Tidd. "Fifteen year hain't nothin' a-tall," he says. "Why, I recollect plain things that happened a couple thousand year ago. That's hist'ry. I don't figger anythin' important ever was forgot. It gits wrote down, or it gits handed down from mouth to mouth. No, siree, fifteen year hain't more'n the tickin' of a clock."

"It would seem," said Mr. Grecco, "that you are right. It might have been better to have waited another ten years. Then men might have died, and their recollections with them. But it could not be so. One must move when

he must move. If we could always pick the hour to suit ourselves! But we so seldom can. Events compel us, Mr. Tidd."

"I got an idee," says Mark, "that things 'u'd go smoother if somebody was to squash that hunchback."

Mr. Grecco shrugged his shoulders. "If it were not he," he said, "it would be some other."

"Managin' the lost Dauphin," Mark said with a grin, "must be a tryin' business."

"Listen," says I. "If John Peter's got so many enemies, hain't he got any *friends*?"

"He seems to me to have found some," says Mr. Grecco. Then, rather solemnly. "Friends are good and friendship is a splendid thing. But you boys are acquaintances of a week. For what you have done I am grateful to you. It has been providential. But I say to you, if you have seen your fill of Taormina, go to Syracuse or Palermo, and go without delay."

Mark blinked and kind of moved his nose around in circles like he can do if he wants to. He can wiggle his ears, too. I've tried, but I can't wiggle my ears and I can't learn how. Some fellows have all the luck. It must be great to be able to wiggle your ears and make your nose go around in circles. Well, Mark did that, and then he says, "Some folks is in-

terested in s-s-scenery and some is all excited over r-ruins."

"Yes," says I, interrupting him, "but all you're interested in is gittin' into trouble."

"Or gettin' out of it," says he.

"Friends of John Peter's," says Mr. Grecco, "are more likely to get into trouble than out of it."

"It seems to me," says Mark, "they'd be l-less apt to git into trouble if they knew jest what kind of t-trouble was layin' around."

"Even John Peter doesn't know that," said Mr. Grecco.

"I been p-puttin' two and two t-t-together," says Mark, "and I cal'late I know considerable. But things don't t-tie up. I can't jest see my way clear."

"Nor can I," says Mr. Grecco.

"What I can't git through my head," says Mark, "is how John Peter got recognized here. . . . Unless it was you being with him, Mr. Grecco, and you was recognized and f-folks drew conclusions from that."

"I think it goes back farther than our visit here." He shook his head gravely. "But one cannot tell."

"I think," says Mark, "I kin understand why the man with the p-p'inted whiskers is after

John Peter, but when men like the lion-lookin' feller in Rendazza pops up, then I git confused. But I bet you that lies right to the h-heart of the matter. This here is a plot that goes back a long ways."

"A very long ways," says Mr. Grecco.

"And the m-more I think of it," says Mark, "the more I think that big old man was right."

"In what respect?" asked Mr. Grecco.

"When he says the Donkey-lifter was a bold man."

But Mr. Grecco only smiled and looked off across the gardens at the mountain.

CHAPTER TWELVE

“THE way it looks to me,” says Mark Tidd, “is t-t-this: If suthin’ hain’t done to s-s-stop it, these here enemies is goin’ to git John Peter sooner or later.”

“They’re bound to have luck sometime,” says I.

“So,” says he, “the only way to s-s-save his bacon is to git right to the s-s-source of things. We got to know *why* enemies are tryin’ to git him, and jest who they are.”

“Sure,” says I. “But we don’t understand this Sicilian language, and how we goin’ about it?”

“John Peter talks it,” says Mark.

“I bet you,” says I, “that old Donna Vanna could tell a heap.”

“Binney,” says Mark, “the’s times when you ain’t a dead loss. That’s an idee. We hain’t h-half p-p-pumped that old lady. Let’s git John Peter to talk the l-language and go see her.”

So we banged on John Peter’s door and he came out, and Mark said to come on, that we

were going to make a call. So he came, and we walked down to Donna Vanna's house.

She was sitting in front, and got up and brushed her lap and kind of smoothed her hair and made a sort of a curtsy to John Peter.

"A good day to you, Mother," he says.

"May San Pancrazio have you in his keeping," she said, "and may the Sacred Beheaded Dead guard your steps in this rocky place." Then she stopped and smiled kind of knowing. "I was expecting you," she says.

"How could you expect us, Mother?" says John Peter. "We didn't know we were coming until a minute ago."

"There are those who know what you will do before it comes into your mind to do it," she said, mysteriously. "Ohe! I hear your steps on the stones in the night. I know it is the steps of the one called Giovanpietro. Three nights I hear them, so I know you will make yourself to arrive."

"Ask her why she calls you Giovanpietro," says Mark.

"Because," she says when this was translated, "it is the custom to speak to a person by his name."

"But that is not all my name," says John Peter.

"Many people," she said, "own two names, as some wealthy persons own two donkeys or two fields. What would you? Your American name I cannot make my tongue to speak. . . . But tell me, is it the truth, or is it a lie, that in America there are buildings as high as Etna?"

"The buildings are very high, Mother, as high as the Hotel Timeo piled upon itself fifty times. . . . But I have not two names. My name is John Peter Sense."

She smiled slyly. "If you convince yourself of that," she said, "then why do you come to me. I am a wise woman; my wisdom is not for those wiser than myself."

"Your pardon, Mother," said John Peter. "We come to sit at your feet. We ask, we do not tell."

"That is well," she said, and nodded her old head eight or ten times. "There should be a proper respect for age. And I am very aged." She acted like she was pretty proud of this. "There is none of the whole island who has greater age than I."

"Nor greater wisdom," says John Peter, and she liked that and grinned so we could see what teeth she had left, and it wasn't many. "Will you tell me the other of my two names?"

"I think," she said, frowning. "I remember the years—the years before you were born—and before your father was born—and before *his* father was born. It is well to take all the truth and lay it side by side before one says this thing or that thing."

"We're in no hurry," says John Peter.

"The Donkey-lifter has told you nothing?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"Not the reason for your coming, nor what you are to do?"

"No."

"Caution is well," she said, "but sometimes too much caution is as bad as too much rain for the crops. It brings ruin."

"Yes," says John Peter.

"I have no son," says Donna Vanna, "which has been a great grief to me. If I had a son he might send me from America a machine to lay eggs so there would be no need to keep hens."

"There is no machine to lay eggs, Mother. The machine only hatched chickens from the eggs."

She considered this. "I do not think the saints would convince themselves that such a

birth was of heaven," she said, calculatingly. "Nevertheless, it would be very useful."

"I think, Mother, you would rather have a dress of purple brocade than a machine to hatch chicks. Such a dress you shall have. It is a present."

"If I speak," she said, crossly, "it is without presents. Nevertheless, the neighbors might envy such a dress. It was purple brocade you said?"

"With button shoes of shiny leather."

She sighed contentedly. "No," she said, "I had no son, but I was mother to a daughter—who is dead—and she was mother to a daughter—who also is dead. I live. I was the strong one of the family." She eyed us proudly.

"And the handsomest in your day, I'll bet," says John Peter.

"If you make sport of an old woman," she said, but not angrily, "you will awake with a twisting pain in the bowels."

John Peter laughed and picked up her hand, but she, with a kind of a fierce gesture, lifted his fingers to her lips and kissed them.

"Because," she explained, "the daughter of my daughter was first to touch you when you came into this world. Ohe! It was but the

day before yesterday—and such a running about. And the old man was pleased, for the family would continue. It is well to be assured the family will continue.” She nodded her head a number of times. “Families are important things.”

“Yes, indeed,” said John Peter.

“But there was one who was not pleased,” said Donna Vanna, “and there was a serpent in his heart. Because, if you had not been born, the whole would have been his when the old man died and when your father died.”

“But my father was a young man,” said John Peter.

“Nevertheless,” said Donna Vanna, “he died.”

She stopped there and would say no more for quite a few minutes, and then she sighed and says, “And now the old man is dead and the Donkey-lifter brings you here. I convince myself that it is better to live in America and have one name, than it is to have another name in Sicily and have an evil happen to one.”

“That,” said John Peter, “is wisdom.”

“Because,” she said, “it is not easy, even with the aid of the most powerful saints, to kill a lie that has lived for fifteen years. A lie with

the age of fifteen years becomes almost the truth."

"And this lie?" asked John Peter.

"That," she said, "is the very meat in the nut."

"Did this lie kill my father?"

"As if it were a knife fresh from the whetstone," she said.

"And it will kill me?"

"You have seen what you have seen," she said simply.

"Then," said John Peter, "you must teach me how to kill this lie."

"Ask her," says Mark, "if your other n-n-name is Giovanpietro Cenci?"

John Peter asked her, and she stared hard at Mark, and says:

"Who is the fat one? He is over-young for much wisdom. Yet how does he know this thing?"

"You'd be s-s-surprised," says Mark with a grin; and she smiled right back at him and nodded her head some more. "Ask her," he says, "if a man with pointed w-w-whiskers that walks in a g-garden overlooking the s-sea is the one that m-made up the lie?"

Again she looked at Mark when the question

was translated to her, and she blinked her eyes and says, "Do the ladies tell you these things? Do they come to dance in your room by moonlight?"

"N-nothin' dances in my room," says Mark. "I jest f-f-figgered it out from s-seein' him and the Crooked One together, and from p-piecin' together this and that."

"All wisdom is a kind of magic," she said. "Good wisdom is white magic; evil wisdom is black magic."

"But what," says Mark, "has the old man in Rendazza that looks like a l-l-lion got to do with it?"

She frowned at him now. "Say to the fat one," she said, "that now he approaches dangerous matters."

"I bet you I know," says Mark.

"There are times to speak and times to be silent," she said.

"But where is my mother and why was I taken to America?" asked John Peter.

"She died upon the dreadful night," said Donna Vanna, "and you were carried away in haste and secrecy that one surely of the blood should be left alive. . . . Because it was an order that none who wore the name and bore the blood should live."

"The man with whiskers I-lived," says Mark.

"For that there was a reason," says Donna Vanna.

"And the old man I-lived—the one that was John Peter's grandfather."

"Because he was rich to hire guards, and because he traveled in distant lands, and because it was not to the interests of such a one as you know of that he should die."

"Not only," says Donna Vanna, "did the father of Giovanpietro die, but a lie clung to his memory. A lie believed by many. It was said that he was a traitor."

"To whom?" says Mark.

"To those to whom it is not wise to be a traitor if one would live to be of great age," says Donna Vanna.

"And there is a s-s-sentence of death against John Peter because his f-father was called a t-traitor?" says Mark.

"It is the truth."

"But that was f-f-fifteen years ago. Would the s-sentence be carried out—if the one with the pointed whiskers did not mix himself up in it?"

"Who knows?" she says. "Memories are long and vengeance is hungry."

"I don't b-believe it would be," says Mark.

"For what reason do you believe this?"

"Because I talked with the old man who looks like a lion. He said there had been no orders."

"Orders," she said, "were given fifteen years ago. Those who carry them out to-day are only obeying. There would have to be other orders contrary to the first. And those could come only if the lie were proven to be a lie."

"Then, by golly!" says Mark, "we got to prove it! Can you help us, Donna Vanna?"

"Not on this day. But I shall consider, and you may come again."

"I'm sure we're m-m-much obleeged," says Mark, and then he turns to John Peter and says, "Come along, Your Grace."

"What's the idea?" says John Peter. "What are you Your-Gracing me about?"

"Because," says Mark, "it's c-c-comin' to you."

"I thought I was the lost Dauphin," says John Peter, and he chuckled.

"You was, for gen'ral p-purposes," says Mark, "but now we got to git down to b-business. No, you hain't the l-lost Dauphin, but you be the Duke of Rendazza."

"Like the mischief I am," says John Peter.

"Ask her," says Mark, and John Peter turned to Donna Vanna.

She nodded. "The fat one speaks the truth," she says.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WELL, you never saw anybody in your life so flabbergasted as John Peter was when he come to realize that he wasn't just a kid that had gone to public school in America and played baseball and everything. And when it set in on him that he was a duke and could wear a coronet or whatever dukes wear, and was a nobleman that could hobnob with kings.

"Fellows," he says kind of slow and serious, "I don't know that I like it."

"The' hain't no need for you to w-w-worry yit," says Mark. "You got to git to *be* a duke. I mean you are one, but you h-h-hain't got none of the doodads that goes w-with it. For all p-p-practical p-purposes you're nothin' but a kid. Till we l-lick the enemy and p-put you on the throne, or whatever it is that dukes sit onto."

"But I'm not sure I want that," says John Peter. "I haven't been raised that way. Maybe I'm Sicilian, but I feel American. I'm used to it and I'm used to thinking American. So I

don't think such an awful lot of dukes. It seems to me I'd rather be just a fellow."

"No reason," says Mark, "why you can't b-be b-both. I been kind of t-thinkin' it over, and seems to me the' hain't nothin' discreditable about b-bein' a duke. The title is kind of fancy work and all, but a duke that's a good duke ought to have a perty good j-job. Now take you. If you cut off this here t-t-title what is the Duke of Rendazza. He's jest a big f-farmer, with f-farms and l-lemon groves and what not. Now nobuddy objects to bein' a farmer. Anybuddy'd druther be a big f-farmer 'n a little one. So, as near's as I kin make out, the Duke of Rendazza wouldn't be nothin' but a f-farmer with a lot of t-trimmin's that might be fun."

"Maybe," says John Peter, "but the idea's sort of hard to get used to."

"I'd be willin' to try it," says I.

"You'd be a s-s-swell-lookin' duke with them f-freckles and that n-nose," says Mark.

"I've seen worse," says I. "You hain't no beauty."

"The's been f-fat *kings*," says Mark. "Lots of 'em is that way. I b-bet I l-look more like a king than you do l-like a duke."

"What you look like," says I, "I shan't mention, because I don't want to fight."

"The question is," says John Peter, "what'll we do, now we know?"

"Talk to the D-d-donkey-lifter," says Mark.

So we went back to the hotel and found Mr. Grecco talking to Mr. Tidd about Roman history, and fishing, and how to half-sole shoes, and toggle joints, and internal-combustion engines, and lemon groves, and camels. It was kind of a hit-or-miss talk from what I could make of it, but they acted like they was enjoying it, so it wasn't anybody's business.

John Peter he waited for a chance, and then he pipes up, "We've just been to see Donna Vanna."

"Ah!" says Mr. Grecco.

"And she recognized me," says John Peter.

"Helped some by Mark Tidd," Mr. Grecco said, kind of grim.

"I done s-s-some g-guessin'," Mark says, as modest as a violet.

"So," says John Peter, "I know who I am and I think it is only right I should be told all about it."

Mr. Grecco he thought a minute, and then he says: "I think the time has come. It was as well you knew nothing until now—nothing of

your parentage, or of why we lived in America, or why we came here at this time. But you are old enough and have common sense to act in accordance with what I tell you."

"Thank you, sir," says John Peter.

"You are," says Mr. Grecco, "the Duca di Rendazza. It was your grandfather who just died. The villa on the hill below, with its beautiful gardens, is yours. The great estates inland are yours. Our purpose in coming to Sicily at this time was to establish your identity and to come into possession of the title and the property."

"But why is some one trying to harm me?" asked John Peter.

"That," says Mr. Grecco, "is at the very root of the story. It is a mystery. A great wrong was done, but we do not know how it was done. There was guilt, but we do not know whose guilt. There was a traitor, but we do not know who was the traitor, although," he says, slowly, "your father was executed as guilty of betrayal."

"But he wasn't," says John Peter, as positive as could be.

"I knew your father well. He was a great gentleman. He could not have been guilty of a betrayal," says Mr. Grecco. "Rather than

betray a friend or an organization he would have allowed himself to be torn to pieces. But it was proven to the satisfaction of those in authority that he was guilty, and so he died. It was a black and terrible treachery, so that the sentence was that not one of his blood should be left alive."

"It must 'a' been p-perty bad, then," says Mark.

"It was."

"Not ag'in' the govament," says Mark.

"No."

"Nor ag'in' a f-f-friend in b-business."

"No."

"But," says Mark, "ag'in' a kind of a society."

"Yes," says Mr. Grecco.

"The Mafia," says Mark.

"The Mafia," says Mr. Grecco, "and it was the Mafia which executed Giovanpietro's father and pronounced sentence of death against his son. . . . Some one betrayed to the authorities a political plot engaged in by certain members of the Mafia for the good of all Sicily. As a result two men were sentenced to death and three to imprisonment for life. And the scheme came to nothing."

"Was my father Mafuisti?" asked John Peter.

"Even though he was the heir to a dukedom," says Mr. Grecco, "he was affiliated with the Mafia."

"Then," says John Peter, "it can't be so bad, after all."

"It is not evil," says Mr. Grecco, "though evil men cling to the fringes of it. Deeds are done and laid upon the Mafia which their hands have not caused. . . . And so, when it was too late to save your father, or even to fight for him, I took his son and fled to America where we have hidden all these years."

"But why did they not kill my grandfather?" asked John Peter.

"It may be because he was so well guarded," said Mr. Grecco. "It may be they spared him because of his age, though that seems improbable. There may have been another reason. I do not know."

"And," says Mark, "you think John Peter's pa was killed because of what somebody else done—and put on to him."

"Yes."

Mark kind of squinted and pinched his fat cheek like he does so much when he is thinking

hard, and then he says, "Somebuddy must 'a' done it."

"Truly."

"Somebuddy that knew," says Mark.

"Yes."

"Somebuddy," he said, "that wanted to do John Peter's father h-harm."

"Yes."

"In f-fact," says Mark, "the whole thing m-mebby was a p-plot to git him out of the way."

"It may be so."

"Who," says Mark, "w-wanted him out of the way?"

"That," says Mr. Grecco, "is the question."

"Um. . . . If John Peter and his father was dead, who would be duke when the old d-duke d-died?"

"A cousin of John Peter's father."

"Does he w-wear p'nted whiskers and a m-mustache shaped like a c-couple of carrots?"

"He does."

"Huh. . . . And now the Mafia is tryin' to ex-ex-execute John Peter?"

"It would seem so."

"Or," says Mark, "m-mebby not."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean s-s-somebuddy may be gittin' men

that is Mafias to b'lieve it's their duty to kill him, when the Mafia would kind of forgit it if they was left alone."

"What makes you think that?"

"An ol' man that l-looks like a l-lion," says Mark, "that we see in Rendazza."

"Ah!" says Mr. Grecco.

"So," says Mark, "what we got to do is p-prove John Peter's pa never was no t-traitor, and then the Mafia will lay off of him and mebbby t-take care of the man that really done the b-betrayin'."

"But how—after all these years?"

"What m-made you come back here to Sicily?" says Mark.

"To try to place Giovanpietro in the house of his fathers."

"But you had s-some s-scheme?"

"I hoped to conceal his identity until I could make investigations and try to find things long hidden. But he was recognized at once."

"That m-makes it l-look as if s-somebuddy knew where he was all the time—and as if they didn't b-bother with him till he come back and got dangerous."

"It does."

"And he hain't d-dangerous to the Mafia?"

"No."

"And if it was the Mafia who knew where he w-was, they'd have carried out the s-sentence?"

"Yes."

"I guess that f-f-fetches us to the p'int where it's jest one man that wants John Peter done up, and that's the man that don't want him to git to be duke."

"That is excellent reasoning."

"So we got to kind of concentrate on that f-f-feller."

"Exactly."

"But we got f-f-friends," says Mark.

"Who?"

"Donna Vanna kin tell you t-that. . . . And we got one that hain't exactly a f-friend nor an enemy. But is kind of sad over it all."

"And that is?"

"The old man who l-looks like a lion."

"Ah!" says Mr. Grecco. "And who is he?"

"I got an idee," says Mark, "but we won't do no t-talkin' about that jest now. I bet you he c-comes in handy. No, we got other t-things on our mind."

"Sich as?" says I.

"Diggin' into the p-past," says Mark. "If you kin git secrets f-five thousand year old out of the tombs of Egyptians, and kin dig up s-se-

crets of the Medici fambly that lived f-five hundred years ago, and kin find out things about the Borgia, why, it don't l-look to me like it is impossible to git at real f-facts about the Duke of Rendazza that happened only f-fifteen year back."

"I don't know why," says Mr. Grecco, "but somehow I feel more encouraged today than I ever have been."

"You jest depend on Mark Tidd," I says. "He's bound to git you out of it. He's the all-fireddest feller for gittin' at things you ever seen."

Mark kind of frowned, and then he grinned and says he's glad *somebuddy* thinks he's got brains. "But," says he, "what we got to do is lay out a p-p-plan of campaign."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

YOU can't do nothin'," says Mark Tidd, "without l-leavin' a mark. It don't matter what it is, why, it s-s-stands to reason it makes t-tracks some'eres. If a f-fly lights on a puddin' ye kin s-see where he drags his feet jest the s-same as ye kin see where an elephant w-walks through a marsh. If you t-tell somebuddy a lie, why, the's allus the f-feller you told the lie *to*, and hidin' back some'eres is the truth ready to pop out. That lie'll make tracks like a fly on a puddin' or an elephant in a s-s-swamp."

"Yes," says Mr. Grecco.

"And," says Mark, "once ye know the's a l-lie hangin' around, you're in a fair way to git at the t-truth."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"It's info'mation," says Mark. "It's what ye might c-call a c-clue. If you know the's a lie and you know the f-feller that t-told it, why, you're quite a piece along. Most lies hain't told jest for fun. And a lie hain't a lie unless it's told *to* somebuddy."

"That certainly is true."

"And," says Mark, "the's allus somebuddy *knows* the lie is a lie, even if it's only the f-f-feller that told it."

"To be sure."

"And," says Mark, "if it's a very b-bad lie and important-like, that f-feller's goin' to worry about gittin' ketched in it, and he's goin' to tell m-more lies and do other t-things to hide it. And fust thing you know he's jest a-livin' right on top of a p-pile of lies that don't b-balance, and all you got to do is jerk out one l-lie and the whole kit and b-b'ilin' comes t-tumblin' down around his ears."

"You're right," says Mr. Grecco.

"So," says Mark, "we got to go lie-h-huntin' jest like a body would go r-rabbit-huntin'. And once we ketch us a good fat lie the job's p-perty near done."

"But we have the lie," says Mr. Grecco.

"No," says Mark, "we jest know the' *is* one. It's the difference between knowin' the's a s-s-squirrel in a hick'ry tree and havin' that squirrel ketched in a box trap."

"I see your point," says Mr. Grecco.

"But what do we *do*?" says I.

"We git out our lie-hound," says Mark, "and put him on the t-trail."

"Say," says I, "if John Peter is the duke, why don't he go and *be* it? I mean wouldn't he swing a heavier oar if folks knowed he was the duke than he does jest as a tourist?"

Mark he looked at me like I was a complete stranger, and he took off his hat and says, "The n-name hain't Binney Jenks, is it?"

"Who's denyin' it?" says I, kind of sharp.

"Nobuddy," says he, "but I didn't recognize you fust off in that disguise."

"What disguise?" says I.

"Actin' intelligent," says he. But he kind of grinned so that it wasn't a mean crack but a compliment. It made me feel pretty good I can tell you, for Mark Tidd don't throw compliments around like the' was waste paper. Not that he ain't always willing to give a body credit, but you got to *earn* the credit. He kept on looking at me and then he says, "Binney, I dunno but what we'll have to p-promote you."

"To what?" says I.

"We'll make you Fust Grand Exalted Ideegitter of the Ancient Order of Lie-ketchers," says he, and then he turned to Mr. Grecco and says, "Kin you do it?"

"But why?"

"To force this other f-f-feller into the open p-pasture instid of hidin' amongst the hazel

bushes," says Mark. "If John Peter sets up as the duke, why, this f-feller with the whiskers has got to do s-s-suthin', hain't he? I s'pose ye kin p-prove John Peter's the duke."

"I have the necessary documents and proofs."

"Then," says Mark, "git busy and use 'em."

"Perhaps you are right," says Mr. Grecco.

"Hain't no p'raps about it," says Mark. "It s-starts the war right out on the b-battle-field instid of havin' a kind of guerrilla f-fight in the woods."

"Very well," says Mr. Grecco. "I will take immediate steps."

"And I," says Mark, "will t-t-take immediate s-s-steps to see what this f-feller does about the immediate s-steps *you* t-take."

"It's worth trying," says Mr. Grecco. "We will make our claim publicly. He will have to dispute it."

"You b-bet," says Mark, "or he'll have to git John Peter out of the way quick."

"I don't suppose," says John Peter, "it occurred to you this might be kind of exciting for me."

"It's been excitin' right along, hain't it?" says Mark. "You can't have p-pie 'thout p-pickin' apples."

"Oh, never mind me," says John Peter. "I'm just the goat, anyhow. I can hide in the cellar."

"What's the name of this f-feller with the p-p'inted whiskers?" says Mark.

"Andrea Cenci," says Mr. Grecco.

"Um. . . . So John Peter's name is Cenci and not Sense?"

"Yes," says Mr. Grecco.

"Giovanpietro Cenci is a heap different," says I, "than John Peter Sense. It hain't so American, for one thing."

"Go on right ahead," says John Peter, "and do whatever you want to with me and my name. The next thing you'll be telling me I'm Santa Claus."

"I dunno," says Mark, "but a few dukes raised in the United States might be a g-g-good thing for this here nobility. Kind of cut the f-f-foolish notions out of it and git to the lean meat."

"I bet," says John Peter, "I'll be a funny duke till I get the hang of it."

"Aw," says Mark, "it's easy."

"Is it?" says John Peter. "When were you a *duke* to find that out?"

"I was jest p-pertendin' I was right then," says Mark. "And when you p-pertend hard enough, why, you't git to be what you p-per-

tend. I cal'late I was as much a d-duke as any-buddy fer a while. And I didn't find no d-difficulty to speak of. Why, you jest go right on b-bein' what you allus was, only you wear a d-different hat. That's all it amounts to. Folks calls you Your Grace instid of Mister. It don't make no difference inside of you, and scarcely any outside. You kin paint a white house green, but that don't move the kitchen into the parlor, and the bedrooms stays on the second floor."

"Mark," says John Peter, "I wouldn't be surprised if you were right."

"Sure," says Mark, "and now Mr. Grecco, if I was you I'd s-s-scurry around and set John Peter up in the duke b-business."

"Very well," says Mr. Grecco. "I shall set the law in motion and make public our claim."

"Good," says Mark, "and the rest of us'll kind of cast an eye on this Andrea Cenci and his rat-ketchin' ferret that they call the Crooked One."

"Me," says Mr. Tidd, "I cal'late I'll go some-eres cool and quiet and read a mite out of the *Decline and Fall*. It kind of quiets a body, and, what with one thing and another, I'm all atremble. I dunno but what I'm goin' to be jest as well pleased when I git back home to Wicks-

ville and Ma Tidd. Still in all, a couple of hours of them old senators and lictors and what not gives a body a comfortable feelin'. They didn't have no dukes then."

"Go ahead, pa," says Mark, "but if you cal'late on goin' out where folks is around I dunno but what I'd put on a necktie instid of t-t-that there tidy you p-picked up off'm the bureau. And you b-better either wear t-two shoes or t-two slippers. Don't make no d-difference which. It might m-make talk."

"I cal'late," says Mr. Tidd, as mild as milk, "I wa'n't noticin' p'tic'lar when I got me dressed."

And he wasn't, neither, nor ever was in his life. And when he got to inventing things he was worse than that. He was jest as apt as not to try to crowd the kitchen clock into his vest pocket, thinking it was his watch. He had a awful good brain for history and inventions, but it didn't seem to run nowheres else.

Well, Mark turned to Plunk and Tallow and says, "I wisht you f-f-fellers would go out and scour around and s-see if you kin see the Crooked One. And if you kin, f-fasten onto him like you was b-blood-suckers. Don't let him git the idee you're f-follerin' him, but

s-stick to him tighter 'a burr to a p-pair of woolen pants."

"Where you goin'?" says Plunk.

"Binney and me," says he, "is goin' to t-take after this here Andrea Cenci."

"And how about me?" says John Peter.

"You," says Mark, "go and s-s-spend the time with Donna Vanna and t-t-talk yourself black in the face. She knows a heap. Make her t-t-tell you everythin', and don't f-forgit a word she says. No t-tellin' when some l-little thing will set us on the t-track."

"Well," says I, "that puts everybody to work! So let's fly at it. I'm tired of settin'."

So we all started off different ways, and Mark says to me, "I bet you this here town'll b-b-boil over when it gits the news about John Peter."

"I bet a heap of things'll boil over," says I, "and I hope I don't git scalded."

"It's a good idee," says Mark, "to git acquainted with the enemy. A f-feller ought to know's much as he kin about him. Now we don't know nothin' about this here Cenci man exceptin' that he's got funny idee's about how to wear whiskers."

"How'll we find out more?" says I.

"I wonder," says Mark, "if he t-t-talks English?"

"Most of these here dukes and sich does," says I. "And he cal-lates to be a duke."

"Anyhow," says Mark, "we kin t-t-try him."

"What d'ye mean?" says I.

"Why," says Mark, "we kin make a afternoon call. Mebby he'll invite us to t-tea."

"Yes," says I, "and put Paris green into it."

"Doggone!" says Mark. "I wisht I could talk this here Sicilian."

"Well," says I, "you can't."

"It's a drawback," says he, "but we'll have to m-manage somehow."

"Pertend you kin," says I. "You're so all-fired good at pertendin'. Maybe you kin pertend so good you'll find yourself speakin' it."

"I got a harder job p-pertendin' than that," says he, kind of placid-like.

"What's that?" says I.

"It's p-pertendin' you hain't a double-j'inted s-smart-alec," says he, and then we walked along together and didn't say much for a while. But then I got curious.

"Jest where," says I, "be we a-goin'?"

"We," says he, "are a-goin' to m-march up to the f-front door of the duke's house and

r-ring the bell and say we come to t-talk over international r-r-relations."

"We won't git in," says I.

"Mebby not."

"And if we do," says I, "we'll git into trouble."

"Well," says he, "what *I* want to know is how kin a body git *out* of trouble if he don't git *into* it? You jest lay back your ears and t-t-tell me that."

"Who wants to git into it?" says I.

"You don't have to come," says he.

That made me kind of mad. "Here's the front gate," says I. "Jam your thumb ag'in' the bell."

So he jammed it.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

NOTHING happened for a spell after Mark pushed the button, so he pushed again, and then a man came and opened the gate and stood looking at us like we were fish-peddlers. But Mark spoke right up and says, "Is Mr. Cenci in?"

The servant he said something back in Sicilian, and I see we weren't getting any place at all. But Mark had another try at it. "Signore Cenci," says he kind of loud. "Signore Cenci. Signore Cenci!"

The servant he puckered up his face like he was trying to think, and he says something again, but all Mark did was keep right on repeating, "Signore Cenci!" till I was like to have screamed. But after a while the servant got tired of hearing it, I guess, so he pointed to the ground and made motions that we understood meant we were to wait there. So we waited while he went off some place.

"He's goin' for reinforcements," says I. "We better git while we're all healthy."

"He's gone for Signore Cenci," says Mark

with a grin; and that's how it turned out to be, for in about four minutes he was back, with the man with the pointed whiskers right behind him. He showed us to his master like we was something in a cage, and Mister Cenci looked us over pretty cool and offish.

"How be ye?" says Mark. "I hope y-you kin s-s-speak English."

"Rather better than you do, I fancy," says Mr. Cenci, like an Englishman.

"What you s-speak," says Mark, "is English English. What I t-t-talk is United States English. It's got the m-modern improvements."

"You asked for me," says Mr. Cenci.

"We got a h-hankerin' to see you," says Mark. "We hain't n-never talked to the relative of a duke. So we jest m-made up our minds we'd c-come and see a m-member of the nobility."

"American tourists," says Mr. Cenci, "are crazy."

"Mebby so," says Mark, as gentle as a lamb. "But they're harmless. You see, we hain't got no n-nobility to home, and it's only natural we sh'u'd want to s-see the s-sights when we git abroad."

"Well," says Mr. Cenci, "now that you've seen me, what?"

"Why," says Mark, "we'd kind of l-like to come in and visit. I bet you you're an inter-estin' f-feller to t-talk to."

Mr. Cenci shrugged his shoulders. Almost everybody in Europe shrugs his shoulders. It's a disease. "Why not?" he says. "You might be amusing, and the morning is dull."

"You hain't got no idee how a-a-amusin' we be," says Mark.

"Then come in," says Mr. Cenci, but you could see he had something in the back of his mind besides letting us entertain him. There was some idea there, and I made up my mind to be pretty careful what I said and done. And I nudged Mark Tidd, too. Mark he just grinned. So we went in, and Mr. Cenci led us to the house and into a big room with pictures on the wall that was hand painted. They were pictures of people, mostly, and Mark says, "Is them your ancestors?"

"That," says Mr. Cenci, pointing to an old gentleman, "is the late duke. The one next is his son."

"He's the duke now, hain't he?" says Mark.

"He is dead," says Mr. Cenci.

"Oh!" says Mark, kind of innocent. "Was he sick l-long?"

"He was never sick," says Mr. Cenci. "He was killed."

"Automobile a-accident?" says Mark.

"A knife," says Mr. Cenci, kind of sharp. "The story goes that he interfered with things which were not his business—a very unhealthy occupation in Sicily."

"He hadn't ought to of d-d-done it," says Mark.

"People," said Mr. Cenci, "should learn valuable lessons from such happenings."

"I bet you they do," says Mark. "I b-bet you, with enough p-practice, they could l-learn how to m-meddle and not git killed at all."

Well, just then the hunchback that was called the Crooked One came spang into the room, and stopped sudden when he saw us and scowled as black as ink. He says something quick to Mr. Cenci and Mr. Cenci says something back again, and then both got to stringing out the lingo as fast as a barrel rolling downhill. But about half a dozen times I caught one word, and it was a name. The name was Donna Vanna. I looked across at Mark to see if he had noticed, but his face was kind of mild and simple, so I knew right off he was no-

ting everything. Whenever you see Mark Tidd look like he was about half baked and lacking two-thirds of his buttons, why that's the time to look out. I watched the Crooked One's face and Mr. Cenci's, and it seemed to me they was mad, and kind of worried, too. Then they jabbered about us, and the hunch-back scowled at us some more and turned around and went out.

Then Mark spoke up and says, "If the duke is dead and his s-s-son is d-dead, too, who's a-goin' to be the n-next duke?"

"I am," says Mr. Cenci, as cool as a cucumber."

"That'll be n-nice," says Mark. "I bet you you're l-lucky. It hain't often a whole row of f-f-folks dies off so a feller kin git to be a d-duke, is it?"

"Will you wear a crown?" says I.

"Dukes wear cornets," says Mark.

"How kin they?" says I. "You kin play a cornet in a band, but you couldn't never git one to stay onto your head."

Mark grinned kind of half-witted at Mr. Cenci and says, "You got to excuse him, mister; he's kind of dumb."

"I hain't," says I, "and I bet you you couldn't

wear a tuba, let alone a cornet. Next thing you'll be sayin' an earl wears a snare drum."

"Are you staying long in Sicily?" says Mr. Cenci.

"Not long," says Mark.

"It would be too bad," says Mr. Cenci, "if you had to stay longer than you like. You're fond of the United States, aren't you?"

"It s-suits us perty good," says Mark.

"If," says Mr. Cenci, "I were in your place, I would go back to it."

"I thought," says Mark, "d-d-dukes allus lived in p-palaces."

"Some of them," says Mr. Cenci, "are contented with villas."

"I don't see," says Mark, "how you git along. The' ought to be retainers and s-s-secret passages and b-battlements and sich like. Is the' any s-secret p-passages in this house?"

"None," says Mr. Cenci.

"Or s-secret rooms where a body kin h-hide?"

"None," says Mr. Cenci.

"Or even s-s-secret d-drawers to p-put the jewels?"

"Why should there be?"

"Because all families of d-dukes ought to

have f-family secrets," says Mark. "And they ought to have the documents about 'em hid in a s-secret drawer so as no-nobody kin find 'em—not till the rightful claimant comes along and ousts the usurper."

Mr. Cenci frowned and says, "What d'ye mean by that?"

"I was jest kind of p-pertendin'," says Mark.

"He's allus doin' that," says I. "You can't half the time tell whether he's doin' what he looks like he's doin', or if he's makin' believe."

"How interesting!" says Mr. Cenci.

"You bet it is," says I, "but sometimes it's kind of bewilderin' to folks that don't understand."

"Um. . . ." says Mark. "I bet you all this f-furniture and everythin' is genuine antiques."

"It is very old," says Mr. Cenci.

"That cabinet there," says Mark, "l-looks like it was home made."

"That," says Mr. Cenci, "is a *credenza*. It was made in Venice during the fourteenth century."

"Gee!" says Mark. "That was before Columbus discovered America."

"We are rather older than America here," says Mr. Cenci, kind of patronizing.

"Well," says Mark, "we're much obleeged to ye. And now we b-better be goin'."

"Won't you have some refreshments?" says Mr. Cenci, kind of sarcastic. "I regret it is not afternoon so I might offer you tea."

"We hain't h-hungry, thank ye," says Mark. And then he kind of grinned. "Hain't no relative of the Borgias, be ye?"

"No," says Mr. Cenci.

"That's good," says Mark. "I didn't know but you m-might be, and I wouldn't want to drink no tea s-served by anybody that was kin to them Borgia folks. Though I never heard tell of 'em p'isonin' tea. Mostly it was wine, wasn't it?"

"Why," says Mr. Cenci, "should I poison you?"

"No reason," says Mark, "but them Borgias done it for f-f-fun. It was a kind of a game. Every t-time they p'isoned a feller it counted points. If they p'isoned a common man it was one point, and if they p'isoned a duke it was t-ten points. Kind of like that. I cal'late they run up a big score."

"Well," says Mr. Cenci, "if you *must* go."

"We got to," says Mark. "We got b-business."

"I hope it turns out successfully."

"That," says Mark, "is what we cal'late to m-make it do."

So he showed us to the gate and we went out into the road and started back for the hotel.

"Now," says I, "what good did that do?"

"What?" says Mark.

"Callin' on Mr. Cenci."

"Scouts," says Mark, "have got to s-s-scout."

"Be we scouts?"

"We're the hull b-blamed intelligence d-department of the army," says he.

"And not so doggone intelligent at that," says I.

"But," says he, "we got important information."

"I didn't," says I.

"Proba'ly not," says Mark; "but I did."

"Then," says I, "let's have it."

"Fust," says he, "I f-found out they was worried."

"I didn't see no signs of it."

He jest shrugged his shoulders. "And s-second," says he, "I f-found out they was worried about Donna Vanna."

"I noticed them s-speakin' her name," says I.



HE DROPPED IT AND GRABBED HIS HAND AND YOWLED

"I bet you the Crooked One was t-tellin' Mr. Cenci that John Peter had gone to see her."

"Why should that worry them?"

"Because," says Mark, "they got an idee she knows s-suthin'. I got the same idee."

"Then why don't she tell it?"

"Mebby she hain't found jest the r-right day fer it. I bet you she's got her reasons."

"She's a witch," says I.

"I druther she was our w-witch than their'n," says Mark.

"Well," says I, "mebby she told John Peter suthin' today when he went to see her alone."

"Mebby," says Mark. "Let's go f-find out."

So we went back to the hotel, and after a while John Peter came in, and so did Plunk and Tallow, all swelled up and important because they had been spyin'. And we went to our room and sat on the floor and on the bed, and Mark says, "Did Donna Vanna tell you anythin' important, John Peter?"

"She was strange," says he, "and did some things that looked like magic, and then she said the day was near, and things like that."

"Yes," says Mark, "but did she s-s-say anythin' important?"

"There was one thing," says John Peter.

"She said there was a message from my father."

"What?"

"Yes. She said that somebody brought her a message from him on that night of terror, as she calls it—after he had been captured and was taken away. The message was funny."

"What was it?" says Mark, all excited.

"Donna Vanna said to me, 'This one comes to me out of the night. He makes himself to scratch upon my window, and in a voice filled with fear he speaks words.' "

"What words?"

"She said, 'The one who scratched spoke painfully and with panting breath.' "A last word from the master," he said. "Himself he could not help. They came upon him too suddenly. But before he died he sent this message, 'When the day comes, tell my son to press the lion's claw.' "

"Gosh!" says Mark, and his eyes almost bulged out of his head, he was so tickled and excited. "You jest can't beat that."

"Beat it?"

"For m-mystery and r-romance and all. *Press the lion's claw!* Fellers, I dunno's I could s-stand much more."

"I don't see it helps much," says John Peter.

“Ye don’t! Jest wait till we press the lion’s claw!”

“But what lion’s claw, and where is it to press?”

“That,” says Mark, “is the f-fun of it. We don’t know. We got to p-puzzle it out.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

“PRESS the lion’s claw,” says I. “That’s a fine message, ain’t it? What’s the idee of it, anyhow? And where’s any lion’s claw? Is a body to run around pressin’ all the lion’s claws he kin find?”

“That,” says Mark Tidd, “would be one w-w-way to do it. But a b-better way would be to f-figger out the right lion’s claw and then give it a good p-push.”

“All right,” says I. “You do the figgerin’ and I’ll do the pressin’.”

“How about Mr. Grecco?” says Plunk. “Mebby he’s acquainted with lion’s claws. You can’t tell but that it’ll give him an inklin’ of somethin’.”

“We will, as soon’s he gits b-back,” says Mark. Then he turned to John Peter and asks him if he’d ever heard tell of any lion, and John Peter says the only lions he was acquainted with was in the circus, which wasn’t very helpful. “Anyhow,” says Mark, “it’s d-doggone interestin’.”

“Yes,” says I, “but s’posin’ John Peter gets

to be the legal duke. How'll that help. These here Mafias 'll keep right on shootin' at him from behind trees and stabbin' him in the ribs and all. It don't look like he was goin' to keep his health unless suthin's done about it."

"What you say," says John Peter, "sounds pretty reasonable. I'd rather be just me and not have any holes in my hide, than to be Duke of Rendazza and look like a pin-cushion."

"We got," says Mark, "to f-fix it so's you won't."

"How?" says I.

"By upsettin' the p-plot."

"What plot?"

"The only p-plot the' is," says Mark, kind of impatient. "The one we been workin' on all the time. We got to p-prove somehow that John Peter's pa wa'n't never no t-t-traitor to the Mafia, and that this here Andrea Cenci and the Crooked One was t-traitors."

"We don't know they was," says I.

"It s-s-stands to reason," says he. "They g-got to be."

"All right," says I. "If they got to be we'll elect 'em. But," says I, "how kin we make 'em take office. Maybe they won't want the job."

"You b-bet they won't," says Mark.

I got to thinking. "Say, John Peter," says I,

"when this thing gits all settled up and you're the duke and all, what in tunket be you goin' to do all the time?"

"I think," says John Peter, with a solemn face, "I'll keep a lemonade stand."

"Go on!" says I. "What fur?"

"'Cat's fur to make kittens' ——" says Tallow, but that's as far as he got, for I stood up and heaved a book at him, and it caught him a clip in the stummick, and he doubled up like cramps had set in on him.

"Why," says John Peter, "I'll own a lot of lemon groves, won't I?"

"Sure."

"And I'll get my lemons for nothing?"

"Sure."

"And sugar's cheap?"

"Ye-ah."

"And I'll get the water for nothing?"

"Yes," says I.

"Well," he says, "that'll make whatever I sell the lemonade for all profit. I don't see how you can beat it."

"But," I says, "it won't be dignified for a duke to stand up and holler, 'Lemo, lemo, five a glass,' like you'd have to."

"I'm not," says he, "going to be a dignified duke. I'm going to be something new in dukes."

I'll bet you," says he, "you won't be able to tell the difference between me now and when I get to be one."

Tallow was always looking on the dark side of things, so he says, "Most likely they'll have a revolution, anyhow, and cut off your head with all the rest of the aristocrats."

"If," says Mark to Tallow, "they was to cut off your h-head, it 'u'd improve ye fifty per cent."

"He could spare the front of it, anyhow," says I. "The part that talks."

"Tallow," says Plunk, "cal'lates to go to the state legislature. He's just practicin' on us."

Well, just then there come a knock at the door and Andrea Zambo that was the concierge stood there with a note, and he says it was for John Peter. The note was from an antique dealer down on the Corso and it said he had just got hold of a fine old sword that dated back to the Medici and all those folks. It seems like John Peter wanted a sword like that and had been asking around for one. So now he says he guesses he'll run down and look if it is what he wants. So he got up, and Mark says he calculates he better take a bath just to show Saturday night don't mean anything to him. Plunk and Tallow let on they was for a crib-

bage game, and I had a book I wanted to read. So everybody was satisfied.

I read a couple of hours, and then Mark showed up and says he was asleep. We went and busted up the cribbage game, and then I says, "Where's John Peter?"

"Hain't seen him since he left," says Tallow.

"Maybe he's in his room," says Plunk.

So we went and pounded on his door, but he wasn't there.

"Takes a long time," says I, "to look at a toad-stabber."

"It's t-t-two hours," says Mark, kind of slow. "Maybe he came back and went out in the g-garden for tea."

"He'd have asked some of us along," says I.

Well, at first we didn't think so much about it; anyhow, I didn't; but Mark looked sort of worried, and we went up to the door and asked Andrea if he'd seen John Peter. He said he hadn't set eyes on him since he went out. He was sure he hadn't come back.

"What shop was he g-g-goin' to?" says Mark.

Andrea didn't know. He said a boy brought the note, and he didn't know who the boy was.

Mark was looking pretty worried by now, and he says: "F-fellers, we got to *know*. We

got to go to all the antique shops and find if he's been there. Each f-feller take a block of them—and h-hurry."

Well, it gave us kind of a funny feeling, but we started out as fast as we could, and it didn't take but twenty minutes for the four of us to visit every antique shop in town. And we met down by the cathedral and Mark says, "Well?"

"Nary sign of him," says Tallow.

"Nor me," says Plunk.

"Nobody I seen sent a note to him," says I.

"Then," says Mark, "it l-l-looks perty bad."

"Why?" says I.

"If," says Mark, "the n-note didn't come from any antique s-s-shop, where in tunket *did* it come from?"

"Ask me suthin' easy," says Tallow.

"It come," says Mark, "from the e-e-enemy."

"Rats!" says I, but I didn't feel that way at all. I was getting scairt.

"It was s-s-sent," says Mark, "to l-lure him away."

"And we let him go," says I. "Not a one of us had the sense to go with him."

"No," says Mark, "and I'm to b-blame."

"How be you?" says I.

"Because," says he, "I s-should 'a' known better. I shouldn't 'a' let him go out alone."

"If," says I, "you'd 'a' gone with him, why, mebbby two of ye would 'a' been missin'."

"That," says Mark, "wouldn't 'a' been so bad. But they wouldn't of d-dared kidnap two of us."

"I bet they'd dast kidnap a dozen," says I. "And now what'll we do?"

"We got," says Mark, "to act quick."

"Then let's," says I. "What first?"

"See Donna Vanna," says he.

So we set off helter-skelter for the wise woman's house, forgetting that not a one of us could talk Sicilian, but Mark he thought of it and sent me scampering back after Andrea Zambo to do the interpreting for us. Zambo came along, because he was always accommodating, and we found Donna Vanna knitting a stocking in front of her door.

"Tell her," Marks says in a kind of a strained voice, "that Giovanpietro is m-missin'."

Andrea put it into the lingo, and she looked up from one to the other of us, "I have persuaded myself this would happen."

"Ask her what she advises," says Mark.

"He is in their hands, and may the Sacred Beheaded Dead guard and protect him," she says. "I will do what is possible with the aid

of the saints, and especially of San Pancrazio, and of my magic."

"Tell her we need more'n s-s-saints and magic jest now," says Mark.

"They have stolen him, but they have not killed him," she says. "I would know if he were dead. It would come to me on the air. No, he is a prisoner. But he is in great danger."

"We g-guessed that," says Mark. "But how'll we go about it to git him back? Shall we go to the p-police?"

"The police," she said, "would be powerless. All depends on one man."

"What m-man?" says Mark.

"The Capo Mafia," she says.

"The boss of the Mafias?" he asked.

"That one and no other," she says.

"But who is he and where is he?" says Mark. "And how does it d-d-depend on him?"

"Having stolen the boy instead of killing him from ambush," she said, "they will hesitate. It may be the Capo Mafia will intervene. He is a fair man and an honest man and a just man. I do not know."

"Where is he?" says Mark.

"We'll have a try at him," says I.

"Are you not afraid? He is a terrible man, also."

"We're afraid," says Mark, "but we can't help that. Where's this boss Mafia f-feller?"

"In Rendazza," says Donna Vanna.

"D'ye mean Cola the Rock-breaker?"

"That," she said, "is the man."

"I knew," says I, "he was suthin' important."

"I'd t-t-trust him," says Mark. "He can be t-t-terrible if he wants to, but he's got a face that you kin trust. I bet folks obeys him quick."

"They do," says Donna Vanna, "or they cease to be alive as other people are."

"Andrea," says Mark, "how quick kin we g-git a car?"

"Fi' minute," says Andrea.

"With a fast d-driver," says Mark. "One you know and can d-d-depend on."

"I get you a married man," says Andrea, "that owna hees own car. He not bust you ona the corner."

"Hop to it," says Mark. And then he says to us: "Binney, you come with me. Tallow, you and Plunk take turns staying in the hotel to t-t-tell the Donkey-lifter as s-s-soon as he gets back. The one not in the hotel s-s-stay on

the street and keep your eyes open for the Crooked One or Andrea Cenci."

"O. K.," says Tallow.

"Tell the Donkey-lifter where we've gone, and why," says Mark. "Tell him I t-t-think John Peter is right in town."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because," says Mark, "they'd f-f-figger we'd think he was taken b-back into the mountains."

"Here comes the car," says I.

"P-pile in," says Mark, and then he poked the driver in the back. "D-d-drive like b-blazes," says he.

year ago. You hain't a-goin' to stand by and see h-harm done him, be ye?"

"I persuade myself," says Cola, "that it is too late."

"No," says Mark, pretty emphatic. "Now you l-look here. You're boss of these here Mafias, and this here Andrea Cenci is p-per-tendin' to do this on account of the Mafia. But he hain't, and you know it. You know it's b-be-cause he wants to git Giovanpietro out of the way and be d-duke himself."

"Can this be proven?" asked Cola.

"No more'n it kin be proved that John Peter's pa was a t-traitor. But you gimme t-time and I'll prove he never was."

"The best I can hope," says Cola, "is to arrive before harm comes to the boy. I may be able to command a delay. But sentence has been passed and I cannot annul the sentence."

"You could," says Mark, "if you know his p-pa was innocent."

"But he was proven guilty."

"By a l-lot of l-lies," says Mark. "I want you should g-git right in the car and come to Taormina. Then we'll f-find John Peter and you git things stopped. And you f-fix it so's there'll be a little time fer me to f-find the lion's claw."

"To find what?" says Cola.

"The lion's claw," says Mark. "It all h-hangs on that. If I kin f-f-find it, why you kin go ahead and have another t-trial if you want to."

"Perhaps," says Cola, "my power will extend so far."

"Then git in," says Mark.

"Do you know where to find him?"

"I bet you I d-do," says Mark.

"He was a handsome boy," says Cola, kind of sad-like. "I would save him if I could."

"Then hurry," says Mark.

So Cola put on his hat and got in, and off we started again, lickety-split. Nobody said much on the drive back, and couldn't have if they wanted to on account of the jolting and jarring and skidding and dodging. I never had sich a ride in my born days, and I never want to have another. I hung onto the car so tight there is marks of my fingers in it now, and I pushed so hard with my feet that I loosened the floor. There are folks that like reckless driving, but I'm not one of them. I don't mind going kind of fast, but I don't like jumping over things and upsetting donkey carts and skidding right onto the edge of mountains. No, siree. My stummick was full of that and I didn't want any second helping.

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We came out at the sea and then climbed up to Taormina, and I got out, and I says, "Mark Tidd, there's a lot of things I'd do for you, but git into another car with a Sicilian driver hain't one of 'em."

"S-scare you?" says he.

"I'm so scairt," says I, "that I've shook the bowknot out of my necktie."

"Well," says he, "go and c-c-calm down. I got to do a lot of thinkin' now."

"You wouldn't do none," says I, "if you had my head, because my spine's shoved right up through my brains."

"It m-must 'a' been a good shot," says he, "to hit that s-s-small target. See if the Donkey-lifter is here."

I ran down to see, but he wasn't, and Cola and the driver and I went to our room to talk it over and see what was to be done, and wait for reports from Tallow and Plunk.

Mark started in to argue. "In the f-f-first place," says he, "John Peter's pa never was a t-traitor, and Donna Vanna knows it."

"What does she know?"

"More," says Mark, "than she'll t-t-tell."

"What has she told?"

"That John Peter is to find the lion's claw,

and the idee is that everythin'll be all right if he does."

"I know of no lion's claw," says Cola.

"N-neither do I," says Mark, "but there is one. And when you know a thing is you kin allus f-f-find it if you look hard enough."

"Where," says Cola, "is the Donkey-lifter? Sentence also was passed against him."

"Seems to me," say I, "you done a lot of sentencin'. The number of sentences you turned out must 'a' amounted to a whole paragraph."

"Shut up, Binney," says Mark.

"I won't," says I. "When I think of a joke, which is seldom, I'm a-goin' to spring it, if I bust."

"Well," says he, "go and t-think up another. It'll take you till Christmas and we won't be d-disturbed."

Well about then Plunk and Tallow came in, and they had been taking turns looking for Andrea Cenci or the Crooked One, while the other hung around the hotel. But Plunk saw us drive up and had run out to find Tallow. Neither of them had seen Signore Cenci, but both of them had seen the Crooked One, and he had been prowling around the streets not a half an hour before.

"So," says Mark, "you s-s-see Giovanpietro

is close by. You can bet the Crooked One is near to where he is."

"It is probable," says Cola.

And then there came a rap on the door and Mr. Grecco came in. When he saw Cola the Rock-breaker standing there he stood up pretty stiff and straight and frowning.

"Why," says Cola, very lofty, "is the Donkey-lifter again in the land of his fathers?"

"To undo a great wrong," says Mr. Grecco.

"You brought the boy?"

"It was necessary."

"And your intentions?"

"To have the truth from Andrea Cenci and to set Giovanpietro in the seat of his fathers."

"If you dared so far—if you had courage to face a second trial before the Capo Mafia, why did you not warn me of your coming, so that I might be prepared."

"Because it seemed necessary to come in secret."

"Yet your secret never was a secret."

"We were discovered."

"And the boy ran grave dangers."

"Yet," says Mr. Grecco, "I took every precaution."

"But," says Cola, "if a new trial were

granted and sentence suspended, what new proof could you bring?"

"I did not appear at the old trial. I can swear."

"You," said Cola, "are a prejudiced witness."

"There is Donna Vanna."

"What can she tell?"

"Who knows?" says Mr. Grecco.

"It was not the action of a wise man."

"Yet I could not help myself. I promised his father. I gave my word on that dreadful night that when the old duke was near his end I would return with the boy and do what I could do."

"A promise," says Cola, "is a promise. Do you know the boy has disappeared?"

Mr. Grecco reached for the wall and kind of wobbled, but he stood up straight again. "Is this your doing, Cola the Rock-breaker?"

"It is no doing of mine."

"Then why are you here?"

"Because this boy fetched me," he says, and pointed to Mark Tidd.

"Why did you go for this man?" says Mr. Grecco.

"Because," says Mark, "I t-t-trust him to give us a square deal. If he hain't an honest m-man, then I never see one."

Cola lifted his great brows and stared at

Mark, and there came into his eyes a kind of a light and he nodded his head. "The fat boy," he says, "is wise. Cola the Rock-breaker grows old. He sees with the eyes of age and perhaps of wisdom. The blood is no longer hot to rule the brain. And so, having seen the boy, and the vigor and the young life of him, I have come to do what I can. But first we must find him. And time presses."

"By this t-time," says Mark, "they'll know you are in town, and they won't dare do anythin' but lay low."

"He never left town by any road," says Tallow, "because Plunk and me inquired everywhere. Mebby they dragged him off down the cliffs, but if they didn't he's in Taormina somewhere."

"And I bet you," says Mark, "I know where."

"You think Andrea Cenci carried him to his own house?"

"To Giovanpietro's own h-house," says Mark. "Because he's the rightful d-duke."

"Where," says Cola, "we cannot reach him. The house is strong. He will refuse us admission. And soon the boy will disappear never to be seen again. What, then, are we to do?"

"If we kin get in and f-f-find him, be you ready to do what you can?"

"I am ready to do what I can," says Cola.

"Then," says Mark, "you jest s-s-sit tight. I'll git you into that h-house so's we kin make a search if I never git another porterhouse steak as long as I l-live. We're wastin' time. You f-f-folks stay here, all but Binney. Binney, you come with me."

"Where to?" says I.

"To f-f-figger out a way of gittin' into that house."

"*Ex-cuse me*," says I. "I never left nothin' in that house."

"All right," says he, "if you're afraid I'll t-t-take one of the other f-f-fellers."

"I'm afraid," says I, "and you know it dog-gone well, and if you hain't afraid, why, you jest hain't got good sense. But if you're goin' I'm goin', so git a move on you."

"The rest," says Mark, "w-wait here."

So we went out and down through the garden to the road where the back gate to the duke's garden was.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

“**W**HAT makes you think,” says I, “that John Peter’s in this house? It don’t seem like sense to kidnap a boy and take him right where folks would expect you to.”

“It’s a s-s-smart thing to do,” says Mark. “Nobody’d expect you to kidnap anybody and keep him r-right under everybody’s nose. No, sir. You’d expect him to be hid some place hard to f-find. So this Andrea Cenci says to h-himself that he’ll put Peter right here and l-leave us l-look in all the hard p-places where he hain’t.”

“Oh!” says I. “Well, mebbby Andrea ain’t so smart as you be. Maybe he didn’t think of sich a scheme at all.”

“Besides,” says Mark, “you can’t c-c-cart a boy as big as John Peter out of t-town and along a lot of roads without him b-bein’ seen.”

“No,” says I, “and you can’t grab a boy on Main Street in a town full of folks, to say nothin’ of tourists, without bein’ seen. But they done it.”

"They didn't grab him," says Mark; "they l-l-lured him."

"It must 'a' been high-class lurin', then," says I, "because John Peter hain't nobuddy's fool."

"The m-main thing," says Mark, "is to f-find out if he's a p-prisoner here."

"We'll jest ring the bell and ask," says I, kind of sarcastic.

"We'll see," says Mark, "if mebbby they left the b-back door open like they done once before."

So we hypered along to the door in the wall, but it was locked tight, and then Mark says, "Well, we got to git it open."

"How?" says I.

"I hain't b-built for climbin' walls," says Mark.

"The idea bein'," says I, "that I be."

"You *could*," says Mark.

"But I hain't a-goin' to. Not if I know myself. I'd look perty gittin' into that garden with all them Mafias, wouldn' I? Say, I'd come out lookin' like a pin-cushion that had been used by one dressmaker for thutty year. No, sir. I cal'late on gittin' home to Wicks-ville all in one piece and without no scars."

"Then," says Mark, "we'll have to f-f-find a

ladder. I kin climb a ladder's good as anybuddy. If it's a strong ladder."

"How would I git over 'thout a ladder?" says I.

"You could s-s-stand on my shoulders and grab the t-top of the wall and p-pull yourself up."

"And nobuddy 'u'd see me," says I as sarcastic as could be. "Hardly anybuddy would notice a feller sittin' on top of a wall. He'd be most as invisible as a rabbit in a corn patch."

"Well," says Mark, without acting disappointed or mad at me or anything, "let's go f-f-find a ladder."

"I bet they don't have ladders in Sicily," says I. And then I says, "Oh, doggone it all, if you got to git me all stabbed up with jackknives and things, why, stand up ag'in' the wall and I'll climb you. If you got nerve enough to git into that garden, I guess I got nerve enough, too. Only I'm scairt, and I want you to know I'm scairt, and when you git back to Wicksville and tell my folks how it happened I hain't with you, why, you jest tell 'em I was scairt."

"Why," says Mark, "s-so be I scairt. But if a body hain't afraid to do a thing, there hain't no c-credit doin' it. If you'd just as soon do it as eat, it don't take no courage a-tall. It's

the feller that's awful afraid but has got the stummick to do it, anyhow, that turns out to be a hero and all."

"I never hankered to be no hero," says I. "So back ag'in' the wall. If you got a pencil and paper you better take down my last words."

"S-shake," says Mark, sticking out his hand.

"What fer?" says I. "I been introduced to ye."

So he grinned, but it was a kind of a serious grin, and backed against the wall and made a stirrup of his hands. First we looked to see if anybody could see us any place, but nobody was in sight, and so I stepped on his hands and then got one foot onto his shoulders. I don't guess he enjoyed the feeling of my heels digging into him, but he never let on. Well, it was quite a scramble, and took a lot of awful skillful balancing before I stood solid on top of him, but he stood like a rock.

"As s-s-soon as you git in," says he, "open the gate."

"I'll do that," says I, "jest after I pull out the first dozen jackknives."

"Ready?" says he.

"I can't quite reach the top of the wall," says I.

"Then," says he, "s-s-stand on my head."

So I clambered up on top of his head, and then I could reach the wall, and I grabbed it and clawed around with my legs until I got one foot up. It was quite a tug. Well, I got one eye over the top and looked around, but nobody was in sight. I didn't hurry scarcely any, but took a good long look, and everything was quiet, so I says to Mark, "G'-by if I don't see ye ag'in," and pulled myself on top and dropped down into a cactus. After that I didn't care much whether I got stabbed or not, because I was used to it.

I picked myself up and began pulling the needles out of where I lit, which was the seat of my pants, and then I made for the door to open it and let Mark in. But when I got to the door it wasn't fastened with just the bolt that was there before. There was a new fastening with a whopping-big padlock, and there wasn't any more chance of getting that door open than there was of jumping the wall from a standing start. You could have knocked me over with a feather, and I want to tell you that nobody in this world was ever as lonesome as I was at that identical minute.

It was a sweet pickle I was in. All alone in that garden, with no way of getting out, and most of the brains of the party in Mark Tidd's

head out in the road. I'm perty good at doing what I'm told, but I'm not so awful spry at thinking up things to do.

So I got close to the door and says, "Mark, kin you hear me?"

"S-sure," says he. "Open the door."

"I got good news for ye," says I. "The's a padlock, and nobuddy short of a blacksmith could git it off."

"Huh!" says Mark, only it was more of a grunt than a remark.

"What in tunket'll I do?" says I.

"Hide," says he, "till I t-t-think up a scheme."

"You better think quick," says I, "or it'll be too late to rescure more'n the pieces. I'm shakin' that hard I'm apt to fly into rags and tatters."

"Scrouch down," says he.

"I'm scrouched so low," says I, "that I look like a dent in the ground."

"L-listen," says he. "You can't be no w-worse off'n what you are."

"If you think that's news," say I, "you're about five minutes late with it."

"What I'm g-g-gittin' at," says he, "is that you m-might as well t-take a chance."

"The' hain't much difference," says I, "be-

tween fallin' a thousand feet and fallin' two thousand."

"See," says he, "if you kin Injun across the garden. Keep out of s-s-sight and s-sneak up on the front gate."

"You didn't need to tell me to keep out of sight," says I. "I hain't got nothin' else on my mind."

"And hide," says he, "as c-clost to the gate as ye kin."

"That," says I, "'ll be perty clost."

"And when you hear s-somebuddy ring the bell once long and twice short, why, you git ready, and if a s-s-servant opens up the door, why you be ready to lick out if anythin' happens so's you kin git p-past."

"What," says I, "is apt to happen?"

"You can't n-never tell," says he.

"All right," says I. "Here goes. If you hear a turrible scream, that'll be me."

"Good l-luck," says he.

"I hope you git your wish," says I, and I listened a minute till I heard him move off perty fast. Then I started sneaking through the garden, and I never did see a garden with so many pricklers into it. There was cactuses and roses and everything else that could stab and scratch and tear. I bet you I left a square yard of

my hide a-hanging onto them bushes. And I missed it. I lost so much skin I began to feel chilly. I wallowed through ponds filled with fish and papyrus and I left part of one cheek on a nail that was drove into a tree. But I kept right on just like nothing had happened, because I wanted to get across to that door as soon as I could conveniently.

It took me maybe half an hour because, betwixt trying to go caref'ly and prying myself loose from thorns and sich like, I had quite a time of it. But I got there and sat down in the middle of a clump of bushes about five foot from the door. It seemed like I smarted from head to foot, and every time I moved I drove in to the hilt a thorn I hadn't had time to pick out yet. But I was ready. I was more than ready.

Then the bell rang so I could hear it faint back in the house and I got ready, but it wasn't Mark Tidd's ring. It was two short rings and a pause and two more short rings. Right away a servant came hurrying down the walk, and I never see a meaner-looking man nor one that I would rather not meet in his master's garden when I hadn't got any business to be there. He opened up the gate quick, and in slipped the Crooked One and hypered fast for the house. I watched him and saw Andrea Cenci come to

the door, and then I heard the Crooked One say something kind of breathless, but all I could understand was a name, and that was Cola. So I guessed that the Crooked One was telling Cenci that Cola the Rock-breaker was in town. Then they went inside and I didn't hear any more.

But that made me pretty certain John Peter was in that house, and I was more certain than ever when the bell rang two short and then another two short, and the servant let in two awful hard-looking people. Then, perty soon, another come along. It looked like that house was filling up with all the tough eggs in Sicily. I wished there was some way of getting word to Mark about the two short rings and then another two short ones, because I figgered out that was the signal. It made me kind of proud to figger this out, because, as I say, brain-work ain't much along my line.

But all I could do was wait. Then, pretty soon, the bell rang again, but it wasn't two short and then two short, but was the signal Mark had told me about. So I got ready to see what was going to happen. And nothing did. I got as clost to the door as I could and said as loud as I dast, "Ring two short and wait and then ring another two short."

"I hear ye," says Mark. "Lay low."

He's the darndest feller for telling you to do something you ain't at all likely not to do. Nobody ever laid no lower than I was laying. I set a record for it.

Well, nobody paid any attention to Mark's ring. I watched the house, but there wasn't a sign of life, and I watched the lock on the door, but there wasn't any way to open it. And then Mark rang the two short rings and followed them up with the other two short ones.

It's funny what a body'll do when he's all excited. I found out I had taken out my slingshot and was holding it all ready to shoot. And there wasn't anything to shoot at, and it wouldn't have done any good if there had been. I judged you couldn't keep over a Sicilian Mafia with a BB shot.

This new signal rung by Mark must have kind of confused them in the house, because both Cenci and the servant came to the door, and stood looking and talking. Then the servant walked down to the gate and took the key out of his pocket, but he just stood holding it and called out something. I didn't understand the language any, but anybody that wasn't just dumb would know he was asking who was there. Of course Mark didn't dast answer.

I could see the man wasn't going to open the door and that he would be going away in a second, so I got perty desperate. I must have kind of lost my head, for the first thing I knew I had up with my sling-shot and let him have it on the knuckles of the hand that held the key. He dropped it and grabbed his hand and yowled. Well, the fat was in the fire, so I let him have a couple more as tight as I could shoot. He let out some more yells and started to run for the house.

I was in for it, anyhow, as soon as they began to think, so I piled out of the bushes, grabbed the key and shoved it in the lock. I heard hollers behind me and feet running, and just as I turned the key and unlocked the lock somebody grabbed me and jerked me about seventy feet. But I managed to let out a bellow that the door was unlocked, and when I got the garden muck out of my eyes to look, there stood Mark Tidd and the Donkey-lifter and Cola the Rock-breaker, inside the garden.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

WELL, for a minute it looked like there might be a party, but when the folks inside took one look at Cola they kind of collapsed, and I don't know that I blame them.

"The boy, is he here?" Cola demanded.

Andrea Cenci kind of hesitated like he figured maybe he would start a revolution or something, but he didn't hesitate very long after he took a look at his friends who had come out and were standing around. They didn't look like people who wanted to start any kind of a rumpus with Cola. So Andrea bit his lip and says, "He is here."

Cola nodded. "And these?" he asked, pointing to the other men.

"You know them," said Andrea.

"I know them," said Cola. "And is some matter to be decided of which I am unaware? Who called these men together?"

"It seemed best," said Andrea. "All things should be done in order and according to the ancient rules."

"I persuade myself you speak the truth," said Cola. "There is, then, to be an inquiry—a trial, perhaps?"

"Yes."

"Of the young Duca di Rendazza, possibly?"

"Yes."

"For what offense?"

"For being the son of his father," said Andrea.

"Of that," said Cola, "he is guilty. The father was sentenced and executed, and the sentence extended to all of his blood. Why, then, the need for a new trial?"

Andrea remained silent.

"I can tell you," said Cola. "The reason was fear. It is well. The friends of this boy are demanding justice. The power is mine to grant it. There shall be a fresh trial, as they ask, and the old inquiry shall be reopened. Come, let us go within where all can be done gravely and in order."

We went into the house and then into that room where Mark and I had been before, and Cola the Rock-breaker said, "Fetch the boy."

In three minutes two men came in with John Peter between them, and when he saw us his face got lighter and his eyes kind of shone and he nodded his head. He looked kind of digni-

fied, too, and I bet there had never been a minute when he had let those folks see he was afraid.

"Accused," said Cola, "you demand a new trial?"

"Yes," said John Peter, "or something. What I demand is to be let loose."

The Donkey-lifter stood up and moved his shoulders, but Cola motioned him to sit down again, and he did without starting any trouble. But I guess everybody knew he was planning to start something if things went against him.

"Your father," said Cola, "has been found guilty of treachery, of betraying his friends and associates who trusted him, to the law. He has suffered the penalty."

"He was not guilty," said John Peter, pretty stubborn. "I never saw him and I don't know him, but I know my father never was a traitor to anybody."

"I am powerless to reverse the old sentence," said Cola, "but I may order a new inquiry. Beyond that I cannot go. If you can prove your father's innocence, it will be well. If you cannot, then the thing must stand as it stands."

The Donkey-lifter spoke. "We came to prove the innocence of my young master," he said. "It was for that I ventured to bring this boy

into peril. But there was not time. We ask for time."

"No," said Andrea Cenci.

"If you could not find proofs in fifteen years," said Cola, "how can you hope to do so in a few days?"

"It is known," said the Donkey-lifter, "that this unjust sentence would have been forgotten. But for that man there"—he pointed to Andrea Cenci—"it would never have been revived. The times have changed. Today is another day. Sicily is another Sicily."

"Sicily," said Cola, "does not change—back in the hills."

"If," said the Donkey-lifter, "this boy is executed, who is his heir?"

"Andrea Cenci," said Cola.

"Is it fit that you, who should be devoted to patriotism and to justice and to the protection of the oppressed of our island, should be upon the side of him who would rob?"

"We may not know Andrea Cenci's private purpose," said Cola. "We are concerned here only with the sentence of our court of justice."

"Was not this Cenci the heir of my young master—if his son should be eliminated?"

"He was."

"Is it not," said the Donkey-lifter in a great

voice, "possible that the same hand which would destroy the boy was the one which destroyed the father? I, as much a Mafuisiti as any here, charge Andrea Cenci with treachery to a member, in that he plotted to lay his own guilt upon the shoulders of another. I charge that Andrea Cenci was the traitor for whose acts my young master died."

"Charges," said Cola, "are not proofs. Have you any word by way of proof?"

"None," said the Donkey-lifter. "But there is proof and I will find it."

"That is not to be permitted," said Cola, sadly.

"What's g-g-goin' on?" Mark asked the Donkey-lifter, and got the gist of it in a minute.

"D-does that mean we got to prove the whole b-business right *now* or John Peter's apple cart is upset?"

"It does," says the Donkey-lifter.

"Hain't there no way to g-git more time?"

"None."

"Think quick," says I, because somehow I got a lot of confidence in Mark when a body gets into a tight corner. "Think awful quick, Mark."

"The lion's claw," says he, kind of to himself. "If we could jest f-f-find the lion's claw."

Then there was some more talk, but Cola bowed his head and looked awful grave and sorrowful. "No more is to be said," he says in kind of a discouraged voice. "I can do no more."

"Then," says the Donkey-lifter, "the doing shall be mine."

He got onto his feet and grabbed a chair, and in another minute I guess something would have happened that would have messed up the furniture, but all of a sudden Mark Tidd jumped to his feet and grabbed the Donkey-lifter's arm and hollers. "P-proof, eh? I cal'-late we got the proof."

"What?" says the Donkey-lifter.

"The proofs," says Mark. "I f-found 'em. I jest f-found 'em."

The Donkey-lifter kind of frowned and says to Cola, "The fat boy says he has evidence."

"Let him produce it," says Cola.

"The lion's claw," says Mark, kind of excited. "Git out of the way here, you. Lemme git at the lion's claw."

Well, sir, he kind of dived across the room at that big hunk of antique furniture that they called a *credenza*, and he went flat on his stummick, and everybody watched him like they thought he was crazy. And one of the legs

under the thing was shaped like a great big claw. Mark was pushing and pulling and poking and tugging at it like all-git-out.

"Press," says I. "Press don't mean pull."

Well, at that Mark pressed down kind of gentle and the whole front of the leg snapped open like there was a spring there and inside you could see a lot of papers. Mark snatched them out and held them toward Cola the Rock-breaker. "There," he says, "is your p-p-proof."

Well, mebbby it was and mebbby it wasn't. That was what we had to find out. You never saw such an expression as Andrea Cenci got on his face, though. It was rage and fright and a whole lot of other unpleasant things. And the Donkey-lifter went and stood by the door and looked pretty dangerous.

Then Cola the Rock-breaker commenced to open and read the papers, and his face didn't change a mite, but was kind of set so that you couldn't guess what he was reading nor what he was thinking about. And he kept right on reading for fifteen minutes, so that I got so nervous I thought I would jump out of my skin. But I didn't. I don't know what would have happened if I had, or how I would have got back into it again. And no fellow wants to go around for life with his skin over in Sicily.

You'd look like one of these pictures you see in drug stores.

And then Cola spoke, but I didn't know what he said until afterwards, though I could make a kind of a guess.

"These papers," he said, "are letters from officials of the police in Palermo—to the traitor. They are also letters from the traitor, in his own hand and signed by his own name. There was a bribe of money. The whole plan is here laid bare." He stopped. "Why," he demanded in a queer voice, "were these letters hidden at the trial? Why? Why were they not brought forward?" Then he stopped again, and kind of stared at Andrea.

"Andrea Cenci," he said, "if you had been content, this day would never have come. But you strove to do to the son as you had done to the father—and the day of reckoning came. You, and you alone, were guilty of that first treachery. You plotted to betray, and you plotted to lay your guilt upon the shoulders of the father of this boy, because you desired to have his wealth and to sit in his seat. . . . Be still" For Andrea tried to say something. "Your day for speaking is past."

The Donkey-lifter commenced to walk across the room kind of slow and terrible toward An-

drea, and nobody, not even Cola, made a move to stop him. I guess, according to Sicilian standards, they figured it was his right to do about as he pleased. But then everybody got a surprise, because John Peter took a step and held up his hands, and says, "No. We have learned better in these fifteen years, my friend. This is not the way to do. You must not touch him."

"I'll crush him with my hands," says the Donkey-lifter.

"No," said John Peter; and then, all of a sudden, he quit being John Peter and got to be a duke. "It is a command," he said.

Well, the Donkey-lifter stopped and stared and kind of hesitated. "This is my house," said John Peter, "and I will have nothing like this happen in it. If I am to live here I want not to remember a thing like that." And he went to the door. "I think," he says, kind of cold and hard to Andrea, "you had better go now. You had better go far and fast. I promise you there shall be no one leave this room to follow you for one hour. After that"—he lifted his shoulders—"I can do no more."

"But," says the Donkey-lifter, "your vengeance. Think, think of his guilt to your father."

"I'm thinking," says John Peter, "of many

things.” And then he got to be all American again, just for a moment. “Beat it,” he said to Andrea, “while the going is good.”

So Andrea Cenci went away from there. Cola followed him with eyes that smoldered. The Donkey-lifter set his jaw. So I says to myself that an hour wouldn’t be any too much of a head start to suit me. Whether it was enough I haven’t the least idea. Nobody has. From that minute Andrea Cenci disappeared and nobody has ever seen hide or hair of him. So I can’t tell whether he got away and is hiding some place, or whether the Mafia caught up with him. Either way was bad enough.

And then John Peter came across the room and shook hands with Mark and with me, and he said a lot of things that made a fellow feel good, only he didn’t say them in a way that made you feel foolish. No, sir, John Peter was a regular fellow, even if he was a duke.

So we all sat in that room for sixty minutes by the clock, and even Cola made quite a fuss over Mark and me. And then the time was up, and everybody left, only John said that, now he was a duke and in his own house, we were all going to leave the hotel and be his guests as long as we stayed in Sicily. Which we did, and that’s about all, but not quite.

CHAPTER TWENTY

WELL, that night we all sat in the same room, Mr. Tidd and us four boys and John Peter, who was now a duke, and the Donkey-lifter, and Mark says, "But what gits me is why your p-pa didn't have them l-letters at his trial. It would of s-saved him and convicted Andrea."

"That," said Mr. Grecco, "I can tell. Those papers were here in their place of concealment. My young master was taken in Rendazza, miles away, and there was the trial within an hour. Friends of Andrea Cenci were about this house and in this house, so that no man might enter it or leave it. I was not there, not with my young master, nor did I know these things. But I do know he demanded to be brought here, or that a messenger should come. But so black against him was the evidence that he was hardly permitted to speak. Nor would he have been allowed to enter his own house. For it was only with difficulty, on that terrible night, that I escaped with the son. And men were injured in that escaping."

"And that's that," says Mark.

"But," says John Peter, "how did you ever come to find those papers."

"I c-cal'late it was luck," says Mark. "I got to thinkin' about the lion's claw, and I says to myself that the l-likeliest place for a man to h-hide suthin' important was in his own house. And then we were right up against it where it l-looked like we has to fish or cut bait pretty sudden. So I says to m-myself, Mark, you *got* to find that lion's claw. And then I h-happened to look at that hunk of furniture, and, sure enough, there was a c-claw. So I had to t-take a chance. It t-turned out to be the right claw, and that's all."

"If," says John Peter, "it hadn't been for you fellows from the start, I don't know what would have become of me."

"Rats!" says Mark.

"But," says John Peter, "all I can do is to say thank you, and that I shall always remember it, and that all I have is yours. My home is your home."

"And," says Mark with a grin, "your l-lem-onade is our l-lemonade. With all them lemon groves you got, I sh'u'd think you could contrive to have up a pitcher of it, with l-lots of sugar in."

Well, we stayed in Taormina awhile, and then the duke got out a couple of his cars and drove us all over the island, to Girgenti where the Greek temples and things are, and to Syracuse, where the quarries are and the Greek theater and the wild papyrus, and to Castrogiovanni on its mountain, and to Catania and Palermo and all over the place. And we saw everything and had a awful fine time. And then we got ready to go, but we couldn't make up our minds whether we ought to go to Naples and take a boat home or if we should go some place else before we quit traveling.

So we argued about that, and Mr. Tidd cast the deciding vote and said we hadn't spent all our money, and that nobody ever went home till his money was gone, and anyhow he didn't feel like he'd be able to face Mrs. Tidd unless he went to Paris and bought her one of those dresses he had heard about. And Mark says he thought his mother would have a swell time with a Paris dress, but there weren't any Romans there. But Mr. Tidd said he guessed he had had enough Romans for a spell, and, anyhow, they were a disappointing lot, because they didn't wear togas, and there weren't any cohorts nor chariot races nor gladiators. And

he had come to figger Romans nowadays were just a fraud.

So we said good-by to the duke and the Donkey-lifter, and to Cola and to Donna Vanna and everybody, and took the boat from Palermo to Naples, and then started by train for Paris.

“And I hope,” says Mark Tidd, “that when we g-g-git there we’ll have a nice, p-p-peaceful, quiet time.”

“We’re jest as apt to,” says I, “as a rabbit is to lick a hound dog.”

And I was right.

THE END





